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## Probe report on SingHealth data breach points to basic failings

COI releases key findings on cyber attack, and makes 16 recommendations with priority for 7

Irene Tham  
Senior Tech Correspondent

Staff who fell prey to phishing attacks. Weak administrator passwords. Not applying a patch that could have stopped the hacking. And an IT cyber-security team that could not even recognise a security incident.

These were among the basic failings that opened the door to Singapore's worst data breach, according to the public report by a high-level panel tasked to probe last June's cyber attack on SingHealth.

And such lax cyber-security practices were no match for the sophisticated cyber attackers, believed to be state-linked. In fact, the Singapore authorities contacted foreign law enforcement agencies for information on the users behind servers linked to the attack.

The 453-page report also offers 16 recommendations – seven of them classified as “priority” – to shore up defences at organisations responsible for critical information infrastructure (CII) systems.

Among other things, CII owners including SingHealth must set rules, to be reviewed at least once a

year, to protect their systems against cyber-security threats.

All administrators must use two-factor authentication, and the use of passphrases instead of passwords should be considered. The industry and the Government should also share threat intelligence.

One key recommendation is that SingHealth appoint its own cyber-security “risk man” rather than rely solely on its IT management vendor, Integrated Health Information Systems (IHIS), for such oversight.

At present, all the domain expertise and resources to detect and manage cyber-security risks lie with IHIS, which the Committee of Inquiry (COI) said is “difficult to sustain” in the long run.

The report also provides a blow-by-blow account of the events that

led to the cyber attack.

Despite the attackers being sophisticated, the COI said, the data breach could have been averted if not for “a blanket of middle-management mistakes” at IHIS, Singapore's central IT agency for the healthcare sector.

For instance, a middle manager of cyber security at IHIS had misconceptions of what constitutes a cyber-security incident, and delayed reporting the network intrusions for fear that additional pressure would be put on him and his team.

Also, the key technology “risk man” at IHIS – cluster information security officer Wee Jia Huo – displayed “an alarming lack of concern” when it was clear that a critical system had been potentially breached.

These lapses contributed to suc-

cessful data exfiltration from SingHealth's electronic medical records system from June 27 to July 4 last year. Hackers stole the personal data of 1.5 million patients and the outpatient prescription details of 160,000 people, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

“The attacker had a clear goal in mind, namely, the personal and outpatient medication data of the Prime Minister in the main, and also that of other patients,” the report said.

But it also noted: “The attacker was stealthy but not silent, and signs of the attack were observed by IHIS' staff. Had IHIS' staff been able to recognise that an attack was ongoing and take appropriate action, the attacker could have been stopped before it achieved its objectives.”

Organisational culture was to blame for some of the missteps.

“One must not lose sight of the fact that the treatment of cyber-security issues and incidents by staff and middle management is very much shaped by organisational culture,” wrote the COI, chaired by retired judge Richard Magnus.

This public report follows the submission of a fuller “top secret” report – detailing the attacker's identity and methods, and SingHealth's system vulnerabilities – to Minister-in-charge of Cyber Security S. Iswaran on Dec 31 last year. The fuller report is not published for national security reasons.

Responding to the public report, Professor Ivy Ng, SingHealth group chief executive officer, said: “Since the incident, we have reinforced the culture of personal ownership of cyber defence so that every staff is empowered to identify and report cyber-security threats.”

Mr Bruce Liang, IHIS chief executive officer, said: “We will... do our utmost to drive change throughout our organisation, with patient well-being as our priority.”

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A6

## Pahang Regent may succeed ailing Sultan to be king

KUALA LUMPUR • The Pahang royal household is set to meet this week to discuss the possibility of the Regent of Pahang succeeding the state's ailing Sultan, paving the way for Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah to become Malaysia's 16th king.

Sultan Ahmad Shah of Pahang, 88, is the next in line to the throne under a unique rotation system, but he is not in good health. His son, Tengku Abdullah, 59, has been Regent for two years, playing the role of acting ruler of the east coast state.

But other contenders are said to have tossed their hats into the ring, fuelling speculation about who might fill the vacancy for the Malaysian king after the resignation of Kelantan's Sultan Muhammad V.

The country's state monarchs have decided they will elect a new king on Jan 24.



(From left) Sultan Nazrin Shah of Perak, who is currently Deputy King; Sultan Muhammad V of Kelantan, who stepped down as Malaysia's king; and Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, the Regent of Pahang, at the 2017 installation ceremony for the former king. PHOTO: BERNAMA

## GPC wants more clarity on MediShield Life coverage

The Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Health is asking the Health Ministry for more clarity on how many subsidised patients get full coverage under MediShield Life.

Three years since its launch, questions are being raised on why two in 10 patients are not getting full cover, and if this needs to be addressed.

GPC chairman Chia Shi Lu told The Straits Times that claim limits were based on data for the previous decade, and “this may not be an accurate reflection of needs and costs today”. He said questions on the adequacy of the cover have been filed for Monday's Parliament sitting.

The Singapore National Eye Centre recently said it will revise its fees after an ST article highlighted how an 83-year-old retiree was able to claim just \$4.50 for his \$4,477 subsidised bill for an eye procedure.

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## Asian markets perk up as US-China trade talks end on upbeat note

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Danson Cheong  
China Correspondent  
In Beijing

Trade talks between the United States and China ended on a positive note yesterday after three days of intense negotiations.

Officials from both countries were reportedly in consultation on a coordinated statement on the discussions, expected to be released this morning. Both sides have otherwise not made any official statements on the outcome of the talks.

In a Twitter post, Mr Hu Xijin, editor of the state-run Global Times, described the talks as arduous, but “conducted in a pleasant and candid atmosphere”.

Before he departed the Chinese capital, Mr Ted McKinney, US Undersecretary of Agriculture for

Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, told reporters that the trade negotiations had been “just fine”.

“It has been a good one for us,” he said, without elaborating.

The outcome, if positive, paves the way for both sides to reach a possible trade agreement before March 1, staving off a US tariff hike to 25 per cent, from 10 per cent, on US\$200 billion (S\$271 billion) worth of Chinese goods.

The news that both sides were making progress buoyed Asian markets yesterday. Japan's Nikkei 225 rose 1.1 per cent, while South Korea's Kospi gained nearly 2 per cent. The Straits Times Index edged up 1.12 per cent to close at 3,158.07 points.

Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He, China's No. 1 negotiator for the talks and President Xi Jinping's top economic adviser, is expected to

lead a delegation to Washington for further talks later this month.

The just-ended trade discussions – led by US Deputy Trade Representative Jeffrey Gerrish and Chinese Vice-Commerce Minister Wang Shouwen – were initially scheduled to end on Tuesday.

The one-day extension “indicates that both sides were very serious about these negotiations”, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said at a briefing yesterday. He added that a good outcome would “not only benefit China and the US, but it would also be good news for the world economy”.

The talks are the first face-to-face meetings since Mr Xi and US President Donald Trump brokered a 90-day ceasefire in trade hostilities last month. The trade war has seen both sides impose tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars worth of

goods from each other.

The vice-ministerial level talks are working-level discussions and not meant to yield a final agreement. But it is a key step before both countries' top negotiators – US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Mr Liu – can sit down to thrash out a deal.

Ahead of the end of the talks yesterday, Chinese media said resolving trade differences would require both sides to compromise.

“(China) has also made it clear that it will not seek a solution to the trade frictions by making unreasonable concessions, and any agreement has to involve give and take from both sides,” the state-run China Daily wrote in an editorial yesterday.

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SEE TOP OF THE NEWS A4&5



US Deputy Trade Representative Jeffrey Gerrish (right) led the US delegation in intense trade talks with China in Beijing over three days. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



# 10 must-reads for today

## 1 No more combat sports

Having achieved her goals of competing in One Championship's mixed martial arts events and representing Singapore in jiu-jitsu, former national swimmer May Ooi has decided to retire from competitive combat sports. The 42-year-old will now focus on teaching capoeira and getting involved in sports administration. **SPORT C7**



Former national swimmer May Ooi (in white) has been a professional mixed martial arts fighter since 2014. TNP FILE PHOTO

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## VIDEO Success against the odds

A swimming pool accident during his first year in university robbed Mr Alwyn Keng of the use of his legs. He decided to return to school and last year, graduated with top honours. <http://str.sg/comeback>

## 2 Report on SingHealth attack

A high-level panel tasked to probe last June's cyber attack on SingHealth outlined in a 453-page public report that many factors, such as lax cyber security practices and organisational lapses, led to the worst data breach in Singapore. The report also makes recommendations on how to boost defences. **TOP OF THE NEWS A1**

## 4 Kim wraps up Beijing visit

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un left for Pyongyang yesterday after spending the final day of his visit to Beijing touring a pharmaceutical factory and conferring with his host, Chinese President Xi Jinping, once more over lunch. Mr Kim arrived in Beijing on a surprise visit on Tuesday. **WORLD A16**

## 6 Making it safer for cyclists

Two-wheeler transport is increasingly vying for space with vehicles. Tempers are fraying on both sides. What solutions are there, particularly from cyclists, asks senior correspondent Zaihan Mohamed Yusof (below). **OPINION A23**



## 7 Dog died while at facility

Prince, a shetland sheepdog that was reported missing, died while he was boarded at the Platinum Dogs Club and was cremated, said the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority. The owner of the facility was arrested after the place was raided. **HOME B2**

## 8 On trial for investment ruse

A former cleaner introduced her friend to a purported investment scheme that did not exist because she wanted him to benefit financially, a court heard yesterday on the first day of Tan Hwee Ngo's trial for allegedly cheating petrol station pump attendant Tan Soy Kiang of at least \$130,000. **HOME B6**



Andy Serkis (right) on the set of Mowgli: Legend Of The Jungle with Rohan Chand, who plays Mowgli. PHOTO: NETFLIX

## 9 Call for SME cooperation

Small and medium-sized enterprises could "hunt in a pack", with larger businesses given incentives to work with smaller firms from non-competing sectors, industry leaders said at a roundtable discussion yesterday, ahead of Singapore's Budget on Feb 18. **BUSINESS C2**

## PODCAST

### A Game Of Two Halves

In this episode, we talk about the Indian cricket team's history-making feat on Monday, Liverpool's recent wobbles and national striker Ikhsan Fandi's trial at Norwegian club Raufoss IL. <http://str.sg/2halves20>

## 3 Relevance of retirement age

The concept of a retirement age and re-employment age is still relevant, based on feedback gathered. While older workers would want to enjoy the same wages and benefits, this must be balanced with ensuring they remain employable, said Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Low Yen Ling. **TOP OF THE NEWS A9**

## 5 Debate on Brexit resumes

The British Parliament has resumed debating Prime Minister Theresa May's plan for her country's withdrawal from the European Union, nearly a month after a crunch vote on her proposal was postponed. Mrs May has given Parliament five debating days on the subject, but the odds are that when the Brexit deal is put to vote next Tuesday, it will be rejected. **WORLD A22**

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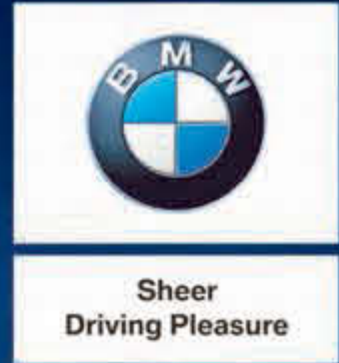
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# Stage set for higher-level US-China trade negotiations

Hopes up both sides can reach deal before deadline for US tariff hike

BEIJING • The just-concluded trade talks between China and the United States should help clear the way for higher-level negotiations later this month, when US President Donald Trump attends the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He, the nation's economic czar, is also expected to go to Washington some time after that.

The trade discussions between mid-level US and Chinese officials, which ended in Beijing yesterday, have raised prospects that the two sides could reach some kind of a deal ahead of the March 1 White House deadline, when US tariffs on some US\$200 billion (S\$271.3 billion) in Chinese goods are set to rise to 25 per cent, from 10 per cent.

"I am optimistic that they are making progress – the tone of the talks is important, and this tone has been good," said Mr Dean

Pinkert, a former commissioner of the United States International Trade Commission. "It is still important to the US government to get credible commitments."

At issue is the extent to which China is willing to offer binding commitments to change trade practices that have long irked Mr Trump.

The scheduled two-day talks extended into a third day as US officials pressed China for more details on how it will live up to its commitments, said people with knowledge of the negotiations who insisted on anonymity to avoid disrupting the talks.

China has made a series of offers to the Trump administration in recent weeks to end the trade war.

But many of the administration's trade hawks regard them as nebulous. They allege that officials in China pressure foreign companies to transfer key technologies to Chinese rivals as a condition for entering the country's market.

They also protest against lavish government subsidies granted through the Made in China 2025

programme to build Chinese firms into global powerhouses in sectors such as commercial aircraft, semiconductors and electric cars.

Chinese officials have agreed to make it easier for multinational corporations to participate in manufacturing development programmes in China. They have also promised to improve intellectual property protection and to ban the forced transfer of technology.

Both sides see reasons to reach a deal soon.

Mr Trump wants to stabilise volatile financial markets, sources said. His Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping is trying to confront weak business and consumer confidence.

Adding to the difficulty of reaching a deal has been the fractious nature of the Trump administration, with the three main government departments involved in the negotiations each pursuing a somewhat different agenda.

US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, a hawk on trade issues, has led the push to impose tariffs on imports from China, and has pursued an ambitious agenda that would require China to carry out verifiable and enforceable changes to the basic structure of its economy.

Mr Trump said last month that Mr Lighthizer would be the lead trade negotiator with China.

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Mr Trump said last month that Mr Lighthizer would be the lead trade negotiator with China.

US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross has been pushing since the early days of the administration for a deal that would require China to buy more food, natural gas and other products from the US.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has been pushing for a quick deal that would stop further increases in US tariffs.

But Treasury would preserve indefinitely the 25 per cent tariffs that Mr Trump imposed last July and August on US\$50 billion a year in Chinese-made goods, or roughly a tenth of US imports, and the 10 per cent tariffs that he imposed in September on another US\$200 billion in Chinese goods.

In the latest sign that the Chinese economy could use a lift from a trade agreement, officials announced yesterday that annual passenger car sales fell last year for the first time in more than 20 years.

Passenger car sales fell to 22.4 million vehicles in 2018, down 5.8 per cent from the previous year.

Complicating the trade talks has been Mr Xi's decision to invite North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to visit Beijing this week.

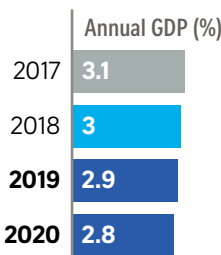
Mr Trump has been pushing North Korea to abandon the development of missiles with nuclear warheads that can reach the US, but he needs China's cooperation to do so because China is North Korea's main ally.

South Korean news agency Yonhap reported that Mr Kim left Beijing early yesterday afternoon – about the same time that the trade talks ended.

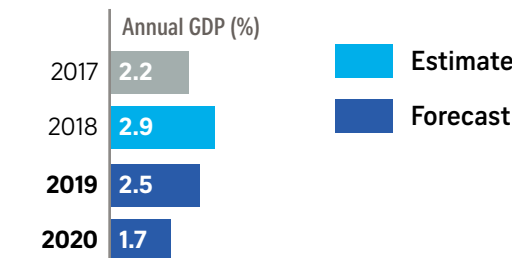
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## World Bank growth forecasts

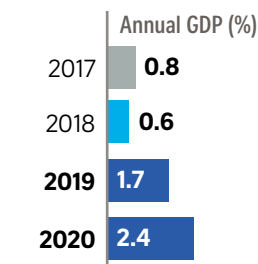
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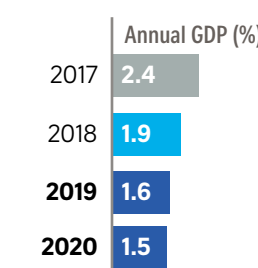
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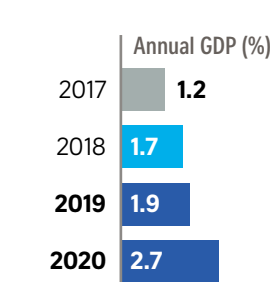
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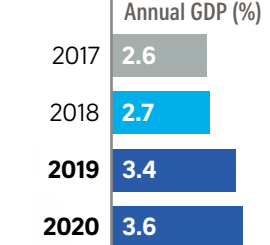
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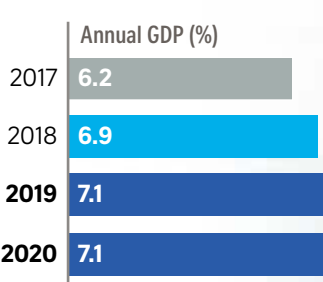
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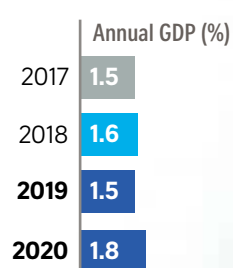
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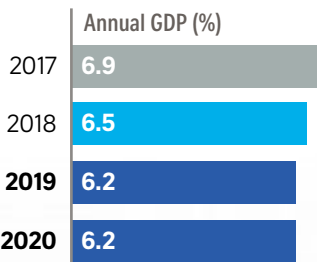
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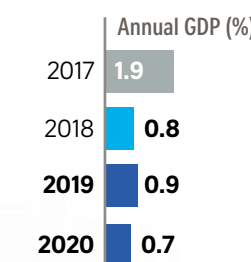
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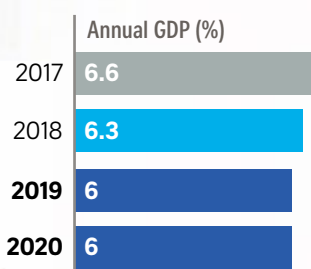
8 CHINA



9 JAPAN



10 EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC



A cargo ship at a port in Qingdao in China's eastern Shandong province last month.

## World Bank warns of threat to global economy from trade conflict

WASHINGTON • Trade conflict between the world's two largest economic powers is already inflicting collateral damage, and threatens to do yet more harm to the global economy, the World Bank has warned.

And the global slowdown is beginning as government and corporate debt rises, especially among the poorest countries, while mounting interest rates increase borrowing costs, the bank said on Tuesday in its semi-annual Global Economic Prospects report.

The report was markedly more pessimistic than a year ago – when the outlook was for synchronised global growth – and peppered with exhortations to take "urgent", "imperative" or "critical" action.

"Risks are rising," said senior World Bank economist Ayhan Kose. "The global economy is going through a difficult period. Skies are darkening, and we see the global economy slowing."

Growth of the world economy is expected to slow to 2.9 per cent

this year, and 2.8 per cent in 2020, slightly below the previous forecast, and the estimates for nearly all regions and countries were downgraded.

At the centre of the turmoil, US economic growth is expected to slow this year by four-tenths of a point, falling to 2.5 per cent, down from 2.9 per cent last year. It is expected to slow even further next year to 1.7 per cent.

China's economy is also slowing amid the trade dispute, and growth

should slip to 6.2 per cent this year and next, compared with 6.5 per cent last year.

Mr Kose, who heads the World Bank's Development Prospects Group – which twice a year produces the global economic forecasts – said he hoped for a resolution, but urged governments to prepare for a difficult road ahead.

"Global growth is still robust but whether a storm will hit or it will clear highly depends on how policymakers are going to react," he said.

Though the bank still sees a low probability of recession in the United States, even a small slowdown has an outsize effect.

And if the US and China slow by a full percentage point, it will cut global growth by nearly the same amount, with dire consequences for many countries.

"Trade tensions are already affecting activity around the world," said Mr Kose, and it could get worse.

The report sharply downgraded the growth forecasts for key emerg-

ing market economies such as Mexico, South Africa and Russia, as well as for crisis-struck countries Turkey and Argentina. So far, India and Indonesia have escaped that fate.

With growing risks dominating the outlook, the World Bank urged member countries to prepare themselves, with changes in spending, investment and borrowing to establish "policy buffers" against coming headwinds. "The sense of urgency has to be there," Mr Kose said.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



# China, US keen to reach trade deal, say experts

Goh Sui Noi  
East Asia Editor

China and the United States are more willing to reach a deal on their trade dispute as both their economies are hurt by its effects and the global economy slows, experts told a forum here yesterday.

But the relationship between the world's two major powers has become more contentious, and how it develops will have an impact on the South-east Asian region.

Both the US and China have incentives to try and reach a trade deal, said Ms Bonnie Glaser, senior adviser for Asia and director of the China Power Project at the American think-tank Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"The worsening of the global economy and the volatility in the stock markets, certainly in the United States, will have an impact on how President (Donald) Trump thinks about negotiations with China," she said in answer to a question at the annual Regional Outlook Forum organised by the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute.

Also, the longer the current tariffs remain in place in the US, the higher the potential for them to increase further, which will affect the American economy even more than they have so far.

"I believe there is a growing desire on the part of President Trump for a deal. At the end of the day, President Trump wants a win, he doesn't want tariffs. Tariffs are not a win," she noted.

As for China, its economy is hurting too, leading the Chinese government to take stimulation measures.

Professor Zha Daojong of the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development of the School of International Studies at Peking Uni-



versity, pointed to the reinstating a few days ago of big-ticket projects that were put on hold last year and which are "not going to pay off".

Answering a question on whether the trade war would undermine China's development, he said many of the US demands "are in line with policy directions that we want to go".

Giving, as an example, the US' call for an end to the requirement for joint ventures - through which American firms are forced to transfer technology to their Chinese partners - he said this is "something we need to get rid of ourselves".

He added: "China has to adapt and adjust to the forces of globalisation just like any other economy."

Ms Glaser said the tariff war is one of the signs that the relationship between the US and China has become increasingly contentious, with strategic competition the dominant feature of ties and cooperation diminished.

Noting that the relationship is at a strategic crossroads, she said the next three months are crucial to the

future of the relationship, and painted three scenarios.

The first is a successful trade deal and moderation of tensions in other areas, with a trade deal providing the momentum towards the return to the US policy of strategic hedging, in which there is a more even balance between competition and cooperation.

In such a scenario, there is some room for South-east Asian countries to manoeuvre and successfully navigate between the two powers. Asean centrality can be sustained, but a lot of work is needed by Asean to ensure that it does remain relevant, Ms Glaser said.

The second is that of a 21st-century version of the Cold War, with intensification of competition militarily, economically and ideologically. Countries in the region could be compelled to take sides.

The third scenario is a grand bargain between the US and China, the contents of which might not be favourable to the region.

However, it could head off com-

petition between the two powers, which would be in the interest of the region.

The experts agree that containment of China is not a good policy.

Mr Peter Varghese, chancellor of the University of Queensland in Australia, said China is too enmeshed in the international system and too important to the region to be contained.

"China's rise needs to be managed, not frustrated; it needs to be balanced, not contained," he said.

Prof Zha noted that when Chinese leaders say the Pacific is wide enough for the two powers, their message is that China and the US can coexist peacefully while having different political systems, and that "there is space for both of us to develop along the path we choose for ourselves".

On Asean's role, he said it was time the regional grouping tried to mitigate the effect of the instinct of China and the US towards rivalry.

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A fibre-optic cable factory in Nantong, China. The US and China have impetus to try and reach a trade deal, but their relationship has become more contentious. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

# US budget deficit on track to hit US\$1 trillion mark

WASHINGTON • The US federal budget deficit continued to rise in the first quarter of fiscal 2019, and is on pace to top US\$1 trillion (S\$1.36 trillion) for the year, as President Donald Trump's signature tax cuts continue to reduce corporate tax revenue, according to the latest data released.

The monthly numbers, released on Tuesday by the Congressional Budget Office, also show an increase in spending on federal debt as rising interest rates drive up the cost of the government's borrowing.

The widening deficit comes despite a booming economy and a low unemployment rate that would typically help fill the government's coffers.

Federal spending outpaced revenue by US\$317 billion over the first three months of the fiscal year, which began in October, the budget office reported.

That was 41 per cent higher than the same period a year ago, or 17 per cent after factoring in payment shifts that made the fiscal 2018 first-quarter deficit appear smaller than it actually was.

The report did show one area of increasing revenue - from Mr Trump's sweeping tariffs.

Revenue from levies on imported steel, aluminium and Chinese goods were up US\$8 billion from the same quarter a year ago, an 83 per cent increase.

That increase, however, is nowhere close to the levels needed to support Mr Trump's frequent claims that his tariffs will help pay down the national debt.

This fiscal year is the first to fully incorporate the reduced tax rates that Mr Trump signed into law in late 2017, including cuts for individuals and closely held businesses and steep reductions for corporations.

Corporate tax receipts fell by US\$9 billion for the quarter, or 15 per cent. Individual receipts fell by US\$17 billion, or 4 per cent. Interest costs on the debt rose by US\$16 billion for the quarter, or 19 per cent.

Interest costs for last month were up 47 per cent from the same month in 2017.

"It is entirely predictable and utterly depressing," said Ms Maya MacGuineas, the president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, which advocates deficit reduction.

"At a time when we should be working to keep the strong economy going and bring our debt down, our lawmakers seem unwilling to pay for anything, and they just keep adding to the debt," she noted. NYTIMES

Revenue from levies on imported steel, aluminium and Chinese goods were up US\$8 billion from the same quarter a year ago, an 83 per cent increase. That increase, however, is nowhere close to the levels needed to support Mr Trump's frequent claims that his tariffs will help pay down the national debt.



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COI on SingHealth cyber attack

# 5 KEY FINDINGS

A high-level panel investigating the cyber attack on SingHealth in June last year recounts in a report released yesterday the factors that led to Singapore’s worst data breach.

- 1

**STAFF LACKED TRAINING IN CYBER SECURITY**  
Staff of Integrated Health Information Systems (IHIS) lacked cyber-security awareness, training and resources to respond effectively to the attack.  
But several of its junior staff – including system engineer Benjamin Lee – showed considerable initiative in spotting and reporting suspicious network activities.  
They, however, could not identify that a sophisticated cyber attack was under way and were not familiar with IT security policies.  
Similarly, a middle manager of cyber security, Mr Ernest Tan, had misguided views of what constituted a security incident.
- 2

**KEY STAFF FAILED TO TAKE REQUIRED ACTION**  
Key cyber-security staff at IHIS failed to take necessary action to prevent the data breach. Cluster information security officer Wee Jia Huo learnt of the suspicious network activities in June. But the key technology “risk man” did not take steps to understand them. The report said he showed “an alarming lack of concern” although by July 4, it was clear a critical system had potentially been breached.  
Mr Wee’s job was to decide if upper management should be alerted about incidents, but he abdicated this responsibility to Mr Tan in this case. Mr Tan delayed reporting it, fearing extra pressure on his team.
- 3

**WEAKNESSES IN NETWORK, SYSTEMS NOT FIXED**  
Vulnerabilities and misconfigurations in SingHealth’s network and systems contributed to the data breach. The attacker exploited an open link between servers in Singapore General Hospital and the electronic medical records (EMR) system.  
The temporary link for database migration to a new cloud-based system was not shut down after the migration was completed.  
An unaddressed coding vulnerability in the EMR software supplied by Allscripts Healthcare Solutions was likely exploited by the attacker to obtain credentials “and cross the last mile” to access patient records, said the report.
- 4

**ATTACKERS SKILLED AND WELL EQUIPPED**  
The attackers were skilled, sophisticated and likely to be state-sponsored.  
They established multiple footholds in SingHealth’s network, enabling them to execute commands from another compromised server on July 19, even as investigations into their earlier breach were under way.  
The earlier breach was carried out over 10 months, primarily targeting the personal and outpatient medication data of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.
- 5

**LET DOWN BY VULNERABLE SYSTEMS, UNTRAINED STAFF**  
While systems will never be breach-proof, the attackers would have found it harder to achieve success had the identified vulnerabilities and misconfigurations been fixed, the report said.  
Also, if IHIS had trained its staff to take appropriate action, the attackers could have been stopped and the breach averted, it added.

Irene Tham



The breach of SingHealth’s IT network and electronic medical records system was carried out by a cyber attacker bearing the characteristics of an Advanced Persistent Threat group, which refers to a class of sophisticated, usually state-linked, attackers who conduct carefully planned cyber campaigns to steal data or disrupt operations. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

### Profile of the attacker

The Committee of Inquiry agrees with the Cyber Security Agency’s assessment that the cyber breach was carried out by a skilled and sophisticated attacker bearing the characteristics of an Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) group, based on evidence during the hearings. APT refers to a class of sophisticated, usually state-linked, cyber attackers who conduct extended, carefully planned cyber campaigns to steal data or disrupt operations. They are known to be extremely persistent in finding ways to get into a network or system once a target has been identified.

#### THE ATTACKER HAD A CLEAR GOAL

- The attacker was focused on accessing and stealing the personal and outpatient medication data of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and other patients.
- Its actions were targeted and specific, and they compromised only selected computers needed to access, copy and transfer data.

#### THE ATTACKER EMPLOYED ADVANCED TACTICS, TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES

- Techniques used by the attacker include customised and stealthy malware. It also found and exploited various vulnerabilities in SingHealth’s IT network and electronic medical records system.
- Apart from evading detection for nearly 10 months, the attacker also covered its tracks by deleting logs in compromised workstations and servers.

#### THE ATTACKER WAS PERSISTENT

- The attack was carried out over more than 10 months, involving multiple attempts at accessing patients’ records using various methods.
- Even after the attack was stopped on July 4, the attacker re-entered the system on July 19 through an earlier established foothold and tried to regain control over the network.

#### THE ATTACKER WAS A WELL-RESOURCED GROUP

- It had the capability to develop customised tools and showed a wide range of technical expertise.

Hariz Baharudin

# 16 RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the five key findings on the SingHealth data breach, the Committee of Inquiry that investigated Singapore’s worst cyber attack made 16 recommendations.

These are aimed at enhancing responses to similar incidents, better protecting SingHealth’s database against similar attacks and reducing the risk of such cyber attacks on public sector IT systems with large databases of personal data. They are grouped into two categories: seven priority recommendations and nine additional recommendations.

### PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1

An enhanced security structure and readiness must be adopted by the Integrated Health Information Systems (IHIS) and public health institutions.  
• Cyber security has to be seen as a risk management issue, and not just a technical issue, where decisions are made at the appropriate management level.  
• IHIS, Singapore’s central IT agency for the healthcare sector, has to take an approach where security is not dependent on just one line of defence.  
• Gaps between policy and practice must be addressed.

- 2

Online security processes must be reviewed to assess their ability to defend and respond to advanced threats.  
• Effectiveness of current processes must be reviewed to fill gaps used by the attacker.

- 3

Staff awareness on cyber security must be improved, to better prevent, detect and respond to security incidents.  
• The level of cyber hygiene among users must improve.  
• A security awareness programme should be implemented to reduce organisational risk.  
• IT staff must be equipped with sufficient knowledge to recognise the signs of a security incident.

- 4

Enhanced security checks must be performed, especially on critical information infrastructure (CII) systems.  
• Vulnerability assessments, safety reviews and certification of vendor products must be done.

- 5

Privileged administrator accounts must be subject to tighter control and greater monitoring.  
• An inventory of administrative accounts should be created to keep track of them.

- All administrators must use two-factor authentication (2FA) when doing administrative tasks.
- Passphrases, instead of passwords, could be used. Password policies must be implemented and enforced.
- Server local administrator accounts must be centrally managed.
- Privileged service accounts must be managed and controlled.

- 6

Improve incident response processes for a more effective response to cyber attacks.  
• Response plans must be tested frequently to ensure effectiveness.  
• A balance must be struck between containment, remediation and eradication, and the need to monitor an attacker and preserve critical evidence.  
• Information needed to investigate an incident must be available.  
• An Advanced Security Operation Centre or Cyber Defence Centre should be established to improve the ability to detect and respond to intrusions.

- 7

There should be partnerships between the industry and the Government to achieve a

- higher level of collective security.
- Threat intelligence sharing should be enhanced.
  - Partnerships with Internet service providers should be strengthened.
  - Apply behavioural analytics.

### ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8

IT security risk assessments and audit processes must be treated seriously and carried out regularly.  
• IT security risk assessments must be conducted on CII and mission-critical systems annually and upon specified events.  
• Audit action items must be remediated.

- 9

Enhanced safeguards must be put in place to protect electronic medical records.  
• A clear policy on measures to secure confidentiality, integrity and accountability of electronic medical records must be formulated.  
• Have real-time monitoring of databases with patient data.  
• End-user access to electronic health records should be made more secure.  
• Controls must be put in place to

better protect against data theft.

- 10

Domain controllers must be better secured against attacks.  
• Operating system for domain controllers must be more regularly updated to protect them against the risk of cyber attack.  
• Limit log-in access and require 2FA for administrative access.

- 11

A robust patch management process must be implemented to address security vulnerabilities.  
• Formulate and implement a clear policy on patch management.

- 12

A software upgrade policy with focus on security must be implemented to increase cyber resilience.  
• A proper governance structure must be in place to make sure policy is adhered to.

- 13

An Internet access strategy that minimises exposure to external threats should be implemented.  
• Internet access strategy should be considered afresh.  
• The healthcare sector should consider the benefits and drawbacks of Internet surfing

separation and Internet isolation technology, and put in place mitigating controls to address the residual risks.

- 14

Incident response plans must more clearly state when and how a security incident is to be reported.  
• It must clearly state that an attempt to compromise a system is a reportable security incident, and include examples as well as indicators of an attack.

- 15

Competence of computer security incident response personnel must be significantly improved.  
• A competent and qualified security incident response manager, who understands and can execute the required roles and responsibilities, must be appointed.

- 16

A post-breach independent forensic review of the network, all endpoints and the electronic medical records system should be considered.  
• IHIS should consider working with experts to ensure no traces of the attacker are left behind.

Hariz Baharudin



# 24 hurt in 3-vehicle crash on Jurong highway

Lorry carrying workers rear-ends one bus and side-swipes another



The Straits Times understands that most of those injured in the accident were in the lorry, which was carrying more than 20 passengers, including one who was trapped in the front passenger seat. PHOTOS: LIANHE WANBAO READER, SINGAPORE BUS DRIVERS COMMUNITY/FACEBOOK

Choo Yun Ting

Twenty-four people were injured in an accident involving two buses and a lorry on Jurong Island Highway yesterday morning.

Police said the lorry driver, a 67-year-old man, was arrested.

Twenty-three of those injured were taken to the National University Hospital and Ng Teng Fong General Hospital.

The Straits Times understands that most of victims were travelling in the lorry, which had more than 20 passengers at the time of the accident.

One of them was trapped in the front passenger seat of the lorry and had to be rescued using hydraulic rescue tools, said the Singapore Civil Defence Force.

It added that one person suffered minor injuries and declined to be taken to hospital.

ST understands that the lorry, carrying foreign workers, was driving behind one of the buses on the left-most lane of Jurong Island Highway when the lorry rear-ended it as the bus stopped to pick up and drop off passengers.

The lorry also side-swiped the other bus, which was travelling in the lane on the right of the other two vehicles.

ST also understands that the driver of the bus rear-ended by the lorry was injured in the accident, but none of the passengers in both buses was hurt.

Mr Ng Ang Heng, 62, a senior executive at Sin U Lian Travel & Coach, which manages the bus that was rear-ended, told ST that there were around 30 passengers travelling in the bus at the time of the accident.

They were foreign workers who were being ferried to and from work, he added.

There were only four passengers on the other bus.

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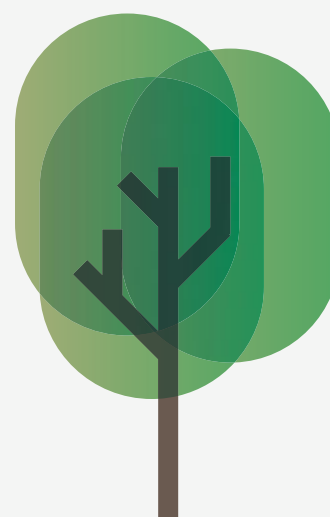
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# GPC seeks details of bills not fully paid by MediShield Life

**Salma Khalik**  
Senior Health Correspondent

The Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Health wants to know why two in 10 subsidised patients are not getting full cover from MediShield Life.

Its chairman, Dr Chia Shi Lu, said the GPC is asking the Health Ministry “for a breakdown” of subsidised patients whose bills are not fully insured.

When compulsory national health insurance MediShield Life was launched in 2015, it was designed to fully cover the big bills of nine in 10 subsidised patients.

Aside from the deductible – the amount a patient has to pay each year before insurance kicks in – and the 3 per cent to 10 per cent co-payment for the rest of the bill, Dr Chia asked: “Does this mean that two out of 10 have out-of-pocket expenses?”

He told The Straits Times that if the claim limits are exceeded for more than 10 per cent of patients – which appears to be the case now – “then the claims criteria will have to be reviewed”.

He said that during the parlia-

mentary debate before the launch of MediShield Life, the Ministry of Health had said claim limits were based on data for the previous decade. “This may not be an accurate reflection of needs and costs today,” he added.

Questions on the adequacy of MediShield Life cover have also been filed for the Parliament sitting on Monday, he said.

Earlier this week, a letter from the ministry revealed that the number of subsidised patients with big bills who are not fully covered by MediShield Life has doubled over the past three years, and now stands at two in 10. Ms Lim Siok Peng, MOH’s director of corporate communications, said in the letter: “Eight in 10 subsidised bills were within the MediShield Life claim limits and nine in 10 were within \$230 of the claim limits.”

Claim limits are set by the ministry for more than 2,500 procedures and cap how much from MediShield Life and Medisave can be used to pay for the treatment. More can be withdrawn from Medisave than can be covered by MediShield Life.

Ms Lim added that together with Medisave, eight in 10 patients

**The Health Ministry’s Ms Lim Siok Peng said there is an ongoing review of claim limits and the consequent impact on premiums, but it will be completed only by the end of next year.**

needed cash payments of \$100 or less for their subsidised bills.

The Straits Times had highlighted the plight of Mr Seow Ban Yam, 83, whose insurance paid only \$4.50 of his \$4,477 subsidised bill. The low coverage was due to his Singapore National Eye Centre bill exceeding the claim limits by more than 50 per cent.

Ms Joan Pereira, also a member of the GPC for Health, said the actual percentage of patients getting full cover could be lower than expected due to differences in the profile and illnesses of patients compared with initial projections. She added: “Hence there should

be adjustments to the claim limits to take into account the current profile of illnesses (and average costs in public hospitals) so that more can receive full coverage by MediShield Life.”

It has been three years since MediShield Life was launched, she said, so “we should be expecting improvements in the coverage for claims going forward as tweaks are being made to the... scheme”.

Ms Lim said there is an ongoing review of claim limits and the consequent impact on premiums, but it will be completed only by the end of next year.

When MediShield Life, the only health insurance for one in three people here, was launched, the MOH promised no changes on premiums and benefits for five years. At that time, Health Minister Gan Kim Yong said MediShield Life “will be a major milestone in reshaping our social policies to provide every Singaporean with lifetime basic protection against medical costs and give him greater peace of mind”.

Dr Chia, an orthopaedic surgeon at Singapore General Hospital, said that from his experience, there are few issues with MediShield Life cover and “we seldom encounter affordability issues any more”. But he added that there are gaps in health insurance, such as those encountered by Mr Seow.

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SEE OPINION A24



Mr Seow Ban Yam’s subsidised bill for surgery to unblock the flow of his tears came to \$4,477, but MediShield Life covered only \$4.50. ST FILE PHOTO

## SNEC patient welcomes decision to adjust charges

Mr Seow Ban Yam, 83, is delighted at the Singapore National Eye Centre’s (SNEC) decision to review and adjust its charges.

“This will help many other people,” he said. He had gone for surgery to unblock the flow of his tears in 2017.

His subsidised bill came to \$4,477, but MediShield Life covered only \$4.50 of it.

He found the insurance cover “ridiculous”, and wrote to the Central Provident Fund Board to ask if there had been a mistake.

According to his calculations, MediShield Life should have paid more than \$1,300, or about 10 per cent, of the bill, after the deductible of \$3,000. But the board told him there was no mistake.

The reason for the low insurance payout was that the subsidised bill from the SNEC was

50 per cent higher than the claim limit for that procedure.

After his case was highlighted in The Straits Times, SNEC chief operating officer Charity Wai said the centre will introduce fee revisions from March.

This will “better align a wider range of procedures with Medisave and MediShield claim limits”, she said. It would include reducing the charge for the treatment Mr Seow had gone for.

She explained that the centre adjusts its charges periodically “to strike a balance between cost recovery and patient affordability”. Ms Wai said that for common procedures like cataract and glaucoma operations, patients can pay with Medisave and need “minimum cash outlay”.

Salma Khalik

# Opening of Botanic Gardens extension pushed back

It will open by year-end after a 12-month delay; details of expansion unveiled at 160th anniversary launch event

Cheryl Teh

Details of an 8ha extension to the Botanic Gardens, which will bring it to its largest size to date, were unveiled yesterday, along with news that the expansion would take about 12 months more than earlier expected.

The Gallop Extension, which will feature attractions including an arboretum full of endangered rainforest trees, a hiking trail and galleries, was announced in 2015, with a completion date of late 2018.

However, the Botanic Gardens’ director of development, Ms Ng Yui-mae, announced yesterday that more time is needed to ensure that the extension and new facilities being constructed are developed sensitively to ensure that wildlife can continue to thrive in the area.

Monthly environmental impact studies indicated that more time was needed to ensure minimal noise and vibration pollution in the surrounding area, and to protect the area’s biodiversity.

“The environmental impact surveys are part and parcel of the process, and these studies made us realise that more time is needed for mitigating measures,” Ms Ng said, adding that contractors have switched to silent piledrivers to reduce noise pollution.

A National Parks Board spokesman said that additional noise monitoring measures have been put in place near the residential areas bordering the Gallop Extension, and adjacent to the Gardens’ ecologically sensitive habitats. Working hours at the site are 8am to 7pm on weekdays, with a half day on Saturday.

The extension to the 160-year-old Gardens – Singapore’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site – will bring its total area to 82ha.

Complete plans for the extension were revealed yesterday at a launch event for the Gardens’ 160th anniversary celebrations, which will tie in with Singapore’s bicentennial year, marking 200 years since Sir Stamford Raffles landed on the island in 1819.

Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister for National Development and Second Minister for Finance, presented six Heritage Tree plaques to donors who made donations of \$1 million and above to the Gardens’ efforts, in areas such as con-

servation and citizen science.

The donors were the Como Foundation, HPL Hotels and Resorts, Keppel Corporation, Mingxin Foundation, OCBC Bank and Mr Tan Jiew Hoe.

“I encourage private individuals and corporations to partner us, to take greater ownership of our Gardens, and do even more with your creativity, imagination and energies,” Mr Wong said.

“Together, we will grow the vision started by our founding leaders, and make the Gardens and our city a more beautiful and special place for our future generations to enjoy.”

Mr Wong also observed an exhibition showcasing the highlights of the Gallop Extension, comprising an arboretum that will hold a collection of 200 to 300 species of the dipterocarp – an ecologically endangered tropical rainforest tree – and a 200m-long canopy linkway over Tyersall Avenue that will offer a sweeping view of the gardens.

There will also be an adventure grove for children and a ridge-top hiking trail that recreates the hill-slope and cliff-edge habitats found in South-east Asia.

The extension will also feature the conversion of black and white colonial houses in the Gallop Road area into two galleries. The first will be located at Gallop House No. 5 (Atbara), the oldest surviving colonial-era bungalow in Singapore. It will become a forest discovery centre – an interactive gallery where visitors can learn about Singapore’s diverse forest habitats.

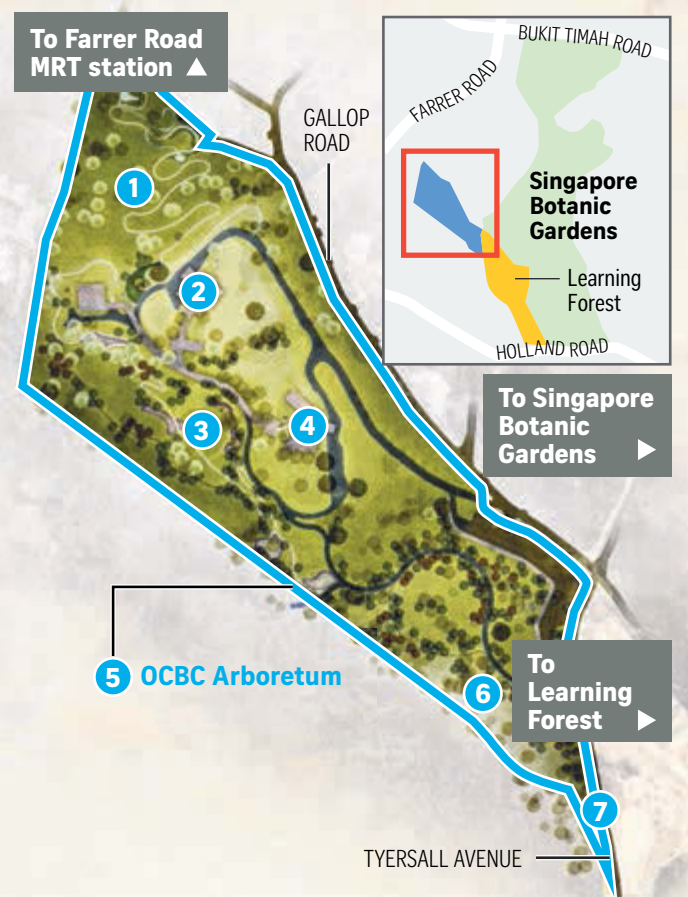
Gallop House No. 7 (Inver turret) will be converted into an art gallery featuring a rotating exhibition of rare botanical art, including water-colours and ink drawings, and wooden block carvings.

The exhibition showcasing the features of the Gallop Extension is open to the public at the Botany Centre.

tienli@sph.com.sg

# 82ha

Total area of the Botanic Gardens after the 8ha extension.



## 2. Botanical Art Gallery

Gallop House No. 7 (Inver turret) was built after Charles MacArthur, the former chairman of the Straits Trading Company, bought over House No. 5 and the land surrounding it. The Botanical Art Gallery will allow visitors to appreciate how art has played a vital role in the scientific documentation of flora and fauna in modern Singapore.



## 4. Forest Discovery Centre at the OCBC Arboretum

Gallop House No. 5 (Atbara) is the oldest surviving colonial-era bungalow in Singapore. It was originally owned by a barrister named John Burkinshaw, who set up what is today one of Singapore’s oldest law firms. At approximately 1,100 sq m, the Forest Discovery Centre will feature interactive displays that allow visitors to learn about the ecology of Singapore’s forests and how they can be involved in the National Parks Board’s conservation efforts.

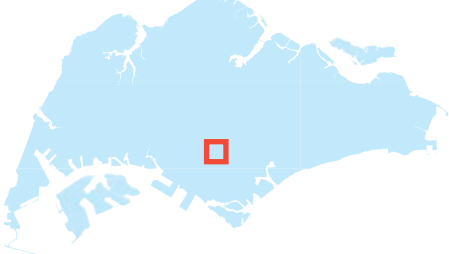


## 6. Mingxin Foundation Rambler's Ridge

Extending from the Canopy Link into the heart of the Gallop Extension, the Rambler’s Ridge will recreate a variety of hill-slope and cliff-edge habitats found in the region. Visitors will descend via a barrier-free path, catching glimpses of the Gardens’ colonial houses.

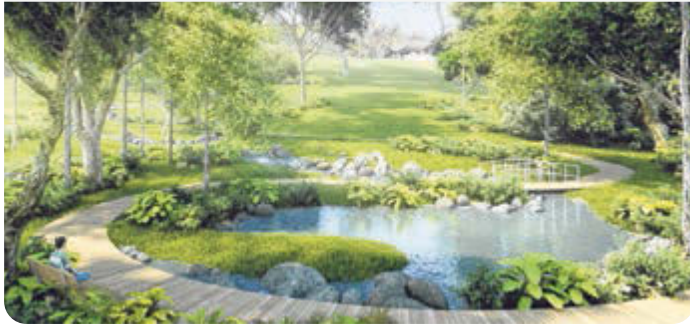


## The Gallop Extension



### 1. Gallop Valley

The Gallop Valley will provide a quiet, calm and restorative experience amid nature. Meandering streams and softer foliage will encourage visitors to immerse themselves in the forest, providing a gentle start or restful conclusion to their time spent at the Gallop Extension.



### 3. Como Adventure Grove

This new play area within the Singapore Botanic Gardens is a modern take on the age-old experience of climbing and playing in trees. Children will be able to swing from structures resembling the aerial roots of the weeping fig (Ficus benjamina) and scramble over the warty surface of a giant cempedak (Artocarpus integer).



### 5. OCBC Arboretum

The OCBC Arboretum serves as both a conservation site and an avenue for visitors to appreciate this ecologically critical family of trees. Around 200 to 300 dipterocarp species will be represented here.



### 7. HPL Canopy Link

A 200m-long barrier-free bridge over Tyersall Avenue, providing visitors with views of the Botanic Gardens.



Source: NATIONAL PARKS BOARD PHOTOS: NATIONAL PARKS BOARD STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



# Panellists discuss ways to help older workers

Feedback gathered by workgroup shows idea of retirement age remains relevant

Joanna Seow  
Manpower Correspondent

The concept of a retirement age and re-employment age is still relevant, based on feedback gathered by a workgroup looking at policies for older workers.

While every older worker would want to continue to enjoy the same wages and benefits as long as they are working, this must be balanced with ensuring that they remain employable and companies remain competitive, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Low Yen Ling said yesterday.

"If the view of the employers is such that the labour market is quite rigid, not flexible enough, you may not see the effect immediately, but when the next investment decision comes, that is when maybe Singapore as a location may not be as attractive," she said.

Unlike Singapore, countries such as Australia and Britain are very large markets and have a critical mass of local companies to provide employment, even if overseas companies choose to leave.

Ms Low was responding to a comment by former Nominated MP Kanwaljit Soin at the Institute of Policy Studies Forum on Older Workers.

Dr Soin had listed those two countries as examples of places where the retirement age was done away with, without affecting competitiveness.

Ms Low was on a panel together with Singapore National Employers Federation vice-president Alexander Melchers and National Trades Union Congress deputy secretary-general Heng Chee How. All three are members of the Tripartite Workgroup on Older Workers.

The workgroup – which was first announced in May last year – is, among other things, reviewing the longer-term relevance of the retirement and re-employment ages, and examining the impact of Central Provident Fund contribution rates for older workers on retirement adequacy.

The proportion of older workers in the workforce has grown over the years, and there are various forms of support for employers to hire and retrain them, such as wage subsidies.

Singapore's full-time employment rate for resident workers aged 55 to 64 was 58.8 per cent in June 2017, placing the Republic in the ninth position against Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

But the Manpower Ministry's divisional director for the workplace policy and strategy division, Mr Lee Pak Sing, said in a presentation at the forum that there is scope to raise the part-time employment rate for older workers, which stood at 8.3 per cent in 2017 for Singapore residents aged 55 to 64. This places Singapore in 23rd position against the OECD countries.

Offering more flexible work arrangements might be one way to help older workers continue working, several speakers suggested.

Many workers want flexibility in changing the intensity of work as they age, said Mr Vikas Sharma, research director of Blackbox Research, which organised public engagement sessions for the workgroup.

"They want a gentle progression from a full job scope to something that is more amenable to them as they advance in their years," he said in a presentation at the forum at the Devan Nair Institute for Employment and Employability. This could involve part-time work, flexible schedules or mentoring roles, for example.

The workgroup has held discussions with workers, public officers, union leaders, employers and human resource professionals across different industries and age groups.

Some of the concerns raised by workers included the stress of being on yearly contracts while re-employed, while employers worried about the rising cost of insurance coverage for older workers, said Mr Sharma.

Speakers and participants at yesterday's forum suggested portable medical benefits and raising the training participation rate among older workers as other ways to help them.

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SEEKING FLEXIBILITY

They want a gentle progression from a full job scope to something that is more amenable to them as they advance in their years.

”

MR VIKAS SHARMA, research director of Blackbox Research, on how workers want flexibility in changing the intensity of work as they age.

(From far left) Speaking at a dialogue session at the forum yesterday were Singapore National Employers Federation vice-president Alexander Melchers, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Low Yen Ling, Nominated MP Walter Theseira, who chaired the session, and National Trades Union Congress deputy secretary-general Heng Chee How.  
ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN



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# WORLD



**RAHAF MOHAMMED AL-QUNUN**  
SAUDI TEEN ASYLUM-SEEKER  
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A Conference of Rulers meeting in May 2017 attended by (from left) Negeri Sembilan ruler Tuanku Muhriz Almarhum Tuanku Munawir; then Terengganu Menteri Besar Ahmad Razif Abdul Rahman; Terengganu Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin; Raja of Perlis Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Putra Jamalullail; Perlis Menteri Besar Azlan Man; Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah; then Selangor Menteri Besar and current Economic Affairs Minister Mohamed Azmin Ali; Perak Sultan Nazrin Shah. PHOTO: BERNAMA

# Abdication complicates the making of a king

For first time since independence in 1957, next in line may not get the minimum five votes needed to be king

**Shannon Teoh**  
Malaysia Bureau Chief  
In Kuala Lumpur

Any hope of a swift resolution to the vacant seat of Malaysia's king was dashed when the country's state monarchs decided they will elect a new king only on Jan 24, despite having met on Monday following the sudden resignation of Kelantan's Sultan Muhammad V as the head of state.

In the past, the process had been relatively straightforward, given that a rotational order among the nine Malay royal houses set out in the Federal Constitution and the regulations of the Conference of Rulers has not been disturbed.

But with more than two weeks to

go before the sultans meet to cast their votes, intrigue over who will be Malaysia's next constitutional monarch continues, with speculation and reports suggesting that more than one sultan has thrown his hat into the ring.

It could mean that for the first time since independence in 1957, the ruler that is next in line may not receive the necessary majority of at least five votes to be offered the position of king.

The current situation is unique as no king has abdicated the federal throne before, presenting the rulers with their first unscheduled election not triggered by death.

Under Malaysia's unique five-year rotation system, the line of succession for kingship is led by Sultan Ahmad Shah of Pahang, 88, fol-

lowed by Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, 60, of Johor, and then Perak's Sultan Nazrin Shah, 62.

But Sultan Ahmad Shah has been unwell, so his son and Regent of Pahang, Tengku Abdullah, has been the state's acting ruler for the last two years.

The New Straits Times reported yesterday that the Pahang palace will meet tomorrow to decide whether the state will install its sixth modern sultan.

Such a move has been suggested since talk of Sultan Muhammad's abdication swirled late last month, though some observers believe that pushing up Tengku Abdullah, 59, as the next king is not without controversy.

In the third schedule of the Constitution, which deals with the election of a king, a clause provides that "whenever there is a change in ruler of a state, that state shall be transferred to the end of the list".

But senior lawyers told The Straits Times that that provision is found in a section dealing with the first cycle through all nine states. The current rotation involving the nine houses is the second cycle.

"The intention was that the rulers in the first round would decide among themselves precedence in accordance with seniority. Hence, a new sultan, who was the most junior, would be put at the end of the first-round list. It would not apply for subsequent rounds," said former Malaysian Bar Council president Christopher Leong.

Thus when the Raja of Perlis died in 2000 and his successor became the king in 2004.

Still, there is also an opinion that the clause about going to the end of the list was not activated in the case of the Perlis ruler as he ascended the throne because of his predecessor's death.

The Pahang house's plan, on the other hand, involves a living ruler abdicating in favour of his son to pave the way for the regent to become king.

Then again, there is also a precedent for this.

Sultan Muhammad V took the Kelantan throne in 2010 when the state's royal council deemed his father - who had suffered a stroke - unfit. Sultan Muhammad V was subsequently elected king in 2016.

Should Pahang not succeed in being elected, the next in line is Sultan Ibrahim of Johor.

But his family has had an uneasy relationship with Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. They had called on Malaysians to keep Barisan Nasional (BN) in power just before last May's general election. But Tun Dr Mahathir's Pakatan Harapan ousted BN.

Given that part of the reason to get Sultan Muhammad V to step down was concerns that the royal institution's image was sullied when Dr Mahathir claimed it delayed approving government appointments, there is some wariness in government circles about having the strong-willed Johor ruler as the next king.

The other candidate is Perak's Sultan Nazrin Shah, the current deputy and acting King.

Known as an urbane and learned ruler who often speaks at public events outside of his royal duties, he is popular among more liberal Malaysians.

The Malaysian king is elected for a five-year term during an Election Meeting, whereby the nomination list follows the order of succession, beginning with the next in line, unless this sultan has already declined the position.

The nine rulers are given a ballot paper each with the name of the first in the order to indicate whether they believe the candidate is suitable to be king.

If the candidate fails to obtain a majority of at least five votes or if he declines the position, the process is repeated with the next name on the list.

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## CHOOSING THE NEXT KING

Malaysia's nine Malay royal houses take turns to appoint a sultan from among themselves to be the king, who will reign for five years.

The following is a list of the Malay states and the period when their ruler was the Malaysian king, a constitutional monarch who represents Malay power and a protector of Islam, the state religion.

The Negeri Sembilan ruler, Tuanku Abdul Rahman Tuanku Muhammad, was chosen as Malaysia's first king in 1957 as he was then the most senior ruler among the nine. When he died in office, the second-most senior ruler was then chosen as the next constitutional monarch.

### FIRST ELECTION CYCLE

Based on seniority of a reigning ruler.

- Negeri Sembilan, 1957 to 1960\*\*
- Selangor, April 1960 to September 1960\*\*
- Perlis, 1960 to 1965
- Terengganu, 1965 to 1970
- Kedah, 1970 to 1975
- Kelantan, 1975 to 1979\*\*
- Pahang, 1979 to 1984
- Johor, 1984 to 1989
- Perak, 1989 to 1994

### SECOND ELECTION CYCLE

Repeats the rotation by state.

- Negeri Sembilan, 1994 to 1999
- Selangor, 1999 to 2001\*\*
- Perlis, 2001 to 2006
- Terengganu, 2006 to 2011
- Kedah, 2011 to 2016
- Kelantan, 2016 to 2019, stepped down
- Pahang
- Johor
- Perak

(\*\* Denotes that the ruler died in office)

Four of the Malaysian states, being former British outposts, do not have Malay royal families. Penang, Melaka, Sabah and Sarawak instead appoint governors as their heads of state for five years.

# Pahang royals to meet this week over succession issue

**KUALA LUMPUR** • The Pahang royal household will meet this week to discuss the possibility of the Regent of Pahang succeeding the state's ailing sultan.

That will pave the way for the regent to become Malaysia's 16th king, the New Straits Times (NST) reported yesterday.

The report, which cites a royal source, came as Malaysia seeks to elect a new monarch after the Sultan of Kelantan, Sultan Muhammad

V, abruptly stepped down as the 15th Malaysian king on Sunday.

Under Malaysia's unique five-year rotation system involving the nine royal houses, the next in line for the Malaysian throne is Sultan Ahmad Shah of Pahang, 88, followed by Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar of Johor, 60, and Sultan Nazrin Shah of Perak, 62.

Sultan Ahmad Shah, who was elected Malaysia's seventh king in 1979, is not in good health. His son,



**Pahang's Sultan Ahmad Shah, 88, who was elected Malaysia's seventh king in 1979, is not in good health.**

Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, 59, has been regent for two years, playing the role of acting ruler in the east coast state.

"The matter (proposal to install Tengku Abdullah as sultan) was submitted by several influential family members and advisers in the royal house. Sultan Ahmad has been informed of the matter," a royal source said, according to the NST report.

Said the source: "The meeting on the abdication will be held this week. It is to be attended only by close family members and advisers."

"The sultan is unwell. Tengku Abdullah has been handling state matters in his father's stead. Based on the rotation system, it is Pahang's turn to be the Yang di-Pertuan Agong after Kelantan. We wish to respect the rotation system."

Under the Pahang Constitution, the succession of rulers can take place if the sultan consents to relinquish his rights and powers.

The abdication must be accompa-

nied by a warrant to acknowledge the relinquishing of powers, signed and stamped with the state's seal by the outgoing ruler.

The signing of the warrant must be witnessed by the menteri besar and the state secretary. The warrant would then have to be declared in the government gazette and to the people in the state.

Aides to Tengku Abdullah and the sultan's office in Pekan declined to comment, due to the sensitivity of the matter, the NST report said.

The report cited sources as saying that Sultan Ahmad had sought treatment at the National Heart Institute in Kuala Lumpur, and was discharged two weeks ago.

Tengku Abdullah is returning from London to attend the meeting, which is expected to take place at the Pahang palace.

On Monday, the Conference of Rulers decided to hold a meeting on Jan 24 to select the new king and hold the new monarch's oath-taking ceremony on Jan 31.

On the possible ascension of Tengku Abdullah as Pahang sultan, Associate Professor Shamrahayu Ab Aziz, a constitutional expert, was cited by NST as saying: "You need to be a sultan before you can be king, regardless of seniority at the state's throne."

"This can be seen in the election of Sultan Muhammad V as the 15th Yang di-Pertuan Agong in 2016 despite being sultan only in 2010."

"The same goes for the rotation system. It is only during the first rotation, which began in 1957, that the seniority of rulers was implemented in guiding the selection process."



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# Indonesia wants Asean to be axis of Indo-Pacific strategy

It aims to get other member states on board to build free and open regional framework

**Linda Yulisman**  
Indonesia Correspondent  
In Jakarta

Indonesia wants to work with other Asean countries to strengthen the regional architecture under an Indo-Pacific cooperation, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said in her annual speech yesterday.

The world's largest archipelagic nation aims to focus on maintaining stability, security and welfare in regions surrounding the Pacific and Indian oceans, which it considers a "single geostrategic theatre".

"We must all ensure that the Indian and Pacific oceans do not become a site of battle for natural resources, regional conflicts and maritime supremacy," Ms Retno said at the event attended by foreign ambassadors and diplomats.

The United States, Japan, Australia and India have advocated a "free and open Indo-Pacific" to augment strategic cooperation among like-minded maritime powers. It involves countries situated within the world's major oceans.

However, there have been different interpretations of the concept. The US, for instance, envisions wider cooperation with Japan, Australia and India as a way to contain China, which has been trying to exert greater power over Southeast Asian countries through its multitrillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo first introduced the country's vision of the concept during the East Asia Summit last November in Singapore. It is based on the key principles of openness, inclusivity, cooperation, dialogue, respect

for international law and Asean centrality.

Asean so far has yet to unite on the issue and may deliberate it in the foreign ministers' retreat next week in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Dr Beginda Pakpahan, a political and economic analyst on global affairs at University of Indonesia, said Indonesia must exercise its free and active approach at the centre of major powers and cooperation.

Along with its Asean neighbours, Indonesia must take an independent stance in the creation of regional governance based on the Indo-Pacific concept, he added.

"The goal is to make Asean an axis of symmetrical interests between itself and its external partners. It can offer peace, regional stability and economic prosperity for countries located between the two oceans," Dr Beginda told The Straits Times.

"By existing means, such as the East Asia Summit and Asean regional forums, Indonesia and other Asean countries must put themselves in the driver's seat in the



Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told diplomats yesterday that the Indian and Pacific oceans should not become a battleground. ST FILE PHOTO

Indo-Pacific framework," he added.

Ms Retno, who is Indonesia's first female foreign minister, also said Asean must be proactive in responding to developments in the region and become the driver of change.

Underlining the importance of stability and security in the South China Sea, she said Indonesia will make sure that the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties, which Asean and China settled late last year, can be fully implemented, and an agreement on the code of conduct will be completed within the

next three years, as expected.

Indonesia also plans to introduce several initiatives to expand regional partnerships, including the Indonesia-South Pacific Forum and Indo-Pacific Maritime Dialogue.

It will also exercise its rights as a member of the United Nations Security Council this year till the next.

It will focus on peacekeeping, fighting terrorism and supporting Palestine, among other issues, said Ms Retno.

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## Indonesia mulling over electric car regime

**Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja**  
Indonesia Correspondent  
In Jakarta

Indonesia is juggling two options as it moves closer to setting regulations on the adoption of electric vehicles.

The impending outcome is set to benefit Japanese car giant Toyota or South Korea's Hyundai Motor and European carmakers such as BMW.

The Joko Widodo administration is throwing its support behind green vehicles as it seeks to reduce the country's reliance on imports of fossil fuel and also tap its abundant nickel reserves. Nickel is a key material for making lithium-ion batteries.

Ministers are debating, according to a government source, if Indonesia should adopt a pure electric vehicle regime from the outset or start first with hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs) that do not require charging stations as they are powered by a conventional internal combustion engine.

Industry Minister Airlangga Hartarto, it is said, prefers a gradual shift by using HEVs. These do not place too heavy a financial burden on the government, which would otherwise have to build charging stations and ensure power plants have the capacity to meet an expected surge in demand.

But, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Ignasius Jonan is opposed to the HEV option and wants the adoption of pure electric vehicles, also called battery electric vehicles (BEVs), the government source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told The Straits Times. BEVs utilise chemical energy stored in rechargeable battery packs.

"The debates have been relatively intense. Discussions also touched on the subsidies given to hybrid electric cars in advanced countries that were recently revoked because they did not have significant impact on reducing emissions because their main source of energy is still fossil fuel," the source said.

Observers expect a BEV regime to benefit Hyundai, which has been successful in playing catch-up in the electric vehicle segment.

But Toyota, whose vehicles make up about a third of automobile sales in Indonesia, is lagging behind in the global electric vehicle race on account of its scepticism about battery life and user convenience.

Indonesia is set to issue a presidential regulation on electric vehicles, dangling a range of tax incentives, including cuts in value-added taxes, to encourage sales and the development of a domestic electric car industry.

Anticipating this, Hyundai is gearing up to announce its maiden electric vehicle investment plan in Indonesia, according to a source with knowledge of the plan.

"The impending regulation is like a battle between Japanese and non-Japanese carmakers in Indonesia," said an analyst with Jakarta-based equity stock brokerage Mandiri Sekuritas who asked not to be named.

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President Joko Widodo wants more Jakarta residents to take public transport so as to reduce the number of cars on the roads. He also wants the capital to further develop and integrate the various modes of transport, as the Greater Jakarta traffic jams have been costing \$6.5 billion yearly. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Jokowi wants to stem massive losses caused by Jakarta jams

JAKARTA • President Joko Widodo is looking to get to grips with the appalling Jakarta traffic, saying that "we have to be brave" to stop the 65 trillion rupiah (\$6.5 billion) annual losses caused by perennial traffic jams.

"We really need to push people to ride public transit modes that we have prepared so we can significantly

reduce the number of cars on the streets," he said on Tuesday.

Mr Joko, popularly known as Jokowi, said bad traffic jams and drivers being stuck in "total congestion" would get worse if the government did not iron out the problem. Traffic congestion in Greater Jakarta costs 65 trillion rupiah every year, he said, quoting data from the National De-

velopment Planning Agency.

He said the many modes of public transport in Greater Jakarta - MRT, light rail transit (LRT), Transjakarta buses, the airport train and commuter trains - had helped reduce traffic congestion.

"But in the future, I expect we can manage all these modes better," he said. He cited as an example the

management of roads, with many different institutions handling different sections.

"Sometimes, they don't manage them well, they are not integrated enough and what happens is that they wait for each other to move first when it comes to maintenance," he said.

Mr Joko also wanted to see more public transport facilities developed and better integrated.

"We can make things with this 65 trillion rupiah, instead of letting it puff into smoke polluting the city."

The Jakarta administration does not have an overarching plan for its public transport modes. The managements of the MRT, LRT, Trans-

jakarta and commuter trains, for example, have plans that overlap.

Mr Joko also wanted to speed up transit-oriented development management, which he said had been stagnant for years because of too many institutions handling it.

"We have the Jakarta administration, the Ministry of State Owned Enterprises, other ministries and the West Java and Banten administrations," he said.

To speed up transit-oriented development, Indonesia needs to take into account spatial and urban transportation planning so as to increase access to public transport, he said. THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK

## Bombs found at Indonesian anti-graft agency leaders' homes

JAKARTA • Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) leaders Agus Rahardjo and Laode Syarif faced terror threats yesterday, with unknown assailants placing what appeared to be bombs at their houses.

It was suspected that a Molotov cocktail exploded at Mr Laode's house.

National Police spokesman Dedi Prasetyo confirmed the incident.

"We found evidence in the form of glass shards and trails of smoke, although we cannot confirm whether it was a Molotov cocktail or another type of bomb," Brigadier-General Dedi said.

According to a report obtained by The Jakarta Post, a bomb squad officer found a black bag hanging on the fence of Mr Agus' house in Bekasi, West Java, around 5.30am yesterday.

The officer found materials resembling components of a high explosive pipe bomb, such as a detonator, cable, nails and pipe.

The bomb squad immediately defused the suspicious package.

At the same time, the remains of a Molotov cocktail were found at Mr Laode's house in Kalibata, South Jakarta.

The KPK deputy chairman claimed to have seen suspicious people near his house around 1am through security cameras. One of his neighbours said she heard glass breaking around 1am.

Brig-Gen Dedi said personnel from the Jakarta Police, the National Police and its Densus 88 counter-terrorism squad were investigating the case. THE JAKARTA POST/ASIA NEWS NETWORK



Explosive materials were found at chairman Agus Rahardjo's home in Bekasi, West Java, yesterday. PHOTO: POLDA METRO JAYA



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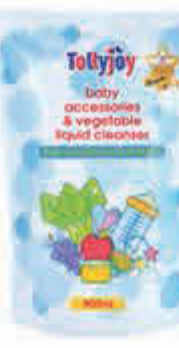
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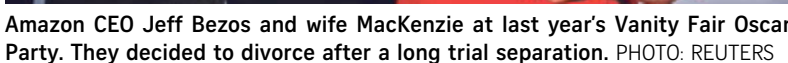


WASHINGTON • Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos and wife MacKenzie Bezos have decided to divorce after a long trial separation, Mr Bezos said yesterday in a joint statement by the couple on Twitter.

"We want to make people aware of a development in our lives. As our family and close friends know, after a long period of loving exploration and trial separation, we have decided to divorce and continue our shared lives as friends," the tweeted statement says.

"We've had such a great life together as a married couple, and we also see wonderful futures ahead, as parents, friends, partners in ventures and projects, and as individuals pursuing ventures and adventures," the tweet says.

The state of Washington – where Amazon is based and the couple have a home – is a community property state, which means all property and debt acquired during a marriage “will be divided equitably by the court if the couple cannot negotiate an agreement”, according to the website of McKinley Irvin, a family law firm in the region.



Under Mr Bezos, Amazon

In November, Amazon picked America's financial and political capitals for massive new offices with plans to create more than 25,000 jobs in both New York City and an area just outside Washington. REUTERS, BLOOMBERG

## N. Korean leader said to have sought Xi's advice on upcoming summit with Trump

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un spent his final day in Beijing touring a pharmaceutical factory and conferring with Chinese President Xi Jinping once more over lunch before leaving for Pyongyang yesterday afternoon on a 14-hour train ride home.

It would mean legitimising North Korea as a nuclear-weapons state, he said. "And this virtually means we are acquiescing."

**The Americans will watch this visit very closely, bearing in mind who Mr Kim brought along.**

**MR SHAWN HO**, associate research fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

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Bk 19 Marsiling Lane #01-297 6269 4019

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**9.50** / Jar  
 UP: \$11.95  
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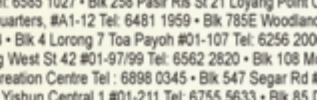
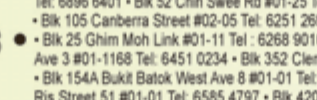
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# Australia will consider resettlement of Saudi teen

Canberra offers runaway hope following UN appeal after dramatic standoff in Thailand

Tan Hui Yee  
Indochina Bureau Chief  
In Bangkok

An 18-year-old Saudi Arabian asylum-seeker whose tweets about resisting deportation from Thailand roused a social media storm this week has been deemed a refugee and will be assessed for possible resettlement by Australia.

Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, who was stopped by officials as soon as she landed at Thailand's Suvarnabhumi Airport early on Sunday morning, holed herself up in an airport hotel room until she was allowed to enter the country on Monday evening for her asylum claim to be processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Australia's Department of Home

Affairs confirmed yesterday that the UNHCR had referred her case to Australia to consider resettlement.

Rahaf, who has renounced Islam, fled from her family on a trip to Kuwait over the weekend, citing psychological and physical abuse.

She is expected to stay in Thailand while waiting for resettlement. She has refused to meet her father and brother, who flew to Bangkok shortly after she was allowed to enter Thailand.

Both father and son were still in Thailand, immigration police chief Surachate Hakpam told The Straits Times yesterday.

Rahaf's friend, who wished to be identified as SH, told ST yesterday morning that Rahaf remains terrified.

"She's actually scared because she is still in Thailand," she told ST

by phone. "Any moment she could be taken to Saudi Arabia."

Rahaf had renounced Islam without the knowledge of her family, said SH. But her family noticed something different in her mannerisms and speech.

"They told her, 'If you leave Islam, we will kill you,'" she said.

SH, a 19-year-old Saudi woman who said she was given asylum in Sweden, has access to Rahaf's Twitter account and corresponded with ST through it. According to SH, two other Saudi women – granted asylum in Australia and Canada – also have access to the Twitter account.

When asked why she was seeking asylum, Rahaf had told Reuters: "Physical, emotional and verbal abuse and being imprisoned inside the house for months. They threaten to kill me and prevent me from continuing my education.

"They won't let me drive or travel. I am oppressed. I love life and work and am very ambitious, but my family is preventing me from living."

In the conservative Saudi kingdom, a woman's guardian – who could be her father, husband or son – needs to give his consent before she can enrol in a school, open a savings account and perform many other everyday tasks.

Saudi Arabia's embassy in Thailand has denied that it asked for Rahaf to be extradited.

"I hope people will still pressure countries to give her asylum," said SH. "I hope people are still tweeting about her so that the Saudi embassy and Thai police would be scared. The world is watching them now."

Speaking on behalf of Rahaf and her two other friends who similarly fled Saudi Arabia, SH made a plea to her country.

"We love our country. We love Saudi, but we feel forced to get out to get protection.

"Please cancel male guardianship so that we can live our lives, we can go to school, we can do everything."

tanhy@sph.com.sg



Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, seen here in a picture on her Twitter account, is expected to stay in Thailand while waiting for resettlement. PHOTO: REUTERS

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## HK set to ban insults to Chinese national anthem

HONG KONG • Hong Kong unveiled a proposed law yesterday to punish anyone who disrespects the Chinese national anthem with up to three years in jail, as Beijing ramps up pressure on the semi-autonomous city to fall into line.

The Bill, which will have its first reading in the city's Parliament on Jan 23, sets up a fresh battle between the authorities and democracy activists who say the financial hub's freedoms are being steadily dismantled.

Hong Kong has mulled the law ever since China fine-tuned legislation on the proper way and place to sing the anthem, tightening rules that already bar people from performing it at parties, weddings and funerals.

A draft Bill showed that the city planned to copy the mainland by introducing a maximum three-year jail sentence for "serious" cases of disrespect towards the anthem.

The draft outlaws playing the anthem "in a distorted or disrespectful way, with intent to insult".

It also forbids altering the anthem's lyrics and its score. As well as possible jail time, offenders will face fines of up to HK\$50,000 (S\$8,700).

Mr Patrick Nip, Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, told reporters the law would "preserve the dignity of the national anthem and promote respect". Defiant Hong Kong football fans have booed the anthem at matches for years. Fans have also previously turned their backs and displayed banners advocating independence for the city.

The draft Bill cited the difficulty of identifying culprits in a crowd of football supporters as one of the reasons police will be given double the amount of time – one year – to investigate a non-indictable offence.

The Bill also ramps up how often China's national anthem will be played at official events, including at the inauguration of new judges.

That may raise eyebrows, given Hong Kong's legal system is separate from the mainland under the 1997 handover agreement with Britain designed to guarantee the city's liberties for 50 years.

Critics accuse China of reneging on that agreement, citing a variety of moves targeting the city's freedom of expression, including a crackdown on activists.

The Hong Kong authorities say they have acted in accordance with national security provisions in the handover agreement.

Pro-democracy lawmaker Claudia Mo accused the government of using the proposed law as a "political weapon" to "help shut down the entire opposition".

The law is expected to pass with few changes as it needs only a simple majority in the city's legislature, which is heavily weighted towards the pro-Beijing establishment. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



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## More Americans blaming Trump for govt shutdown

NEW YORK • A growing proportion of Americans blame US President Donald Trump for a partial government shutdown that will cut off pay cheques to federal workers this week, according to a Reuters-Ipsos poll.

However, Republicans mostly support his refusal to approve a budget without taxpayer dollars for the US-Mexico border wall, showed the poll, which was released on Tuesday.

The national opinion poll, which ran from Jan 1 to Jan 7, found that 51 per cent of adults believe Mr Trump “deserves most of the blame” for the shutdown, which entered its 19th day yesterday.

That is up 4 percentage points from a similar poll that ran from Dec 21 to 25.

Another 32 per cent blame congressional Democrats for the shutdown and 7 per cent blame congressional Republicans, according to the poll. Those percentages are mostly unchanged from the previous poll.

Mr Trump has pledged to keep the government partially closed until Congress approves the US\$5.7 billion (\$57.7 billion) funding for the steel barrier.

Illegal border crossings into the United States have declined dramatically in recent years, yet, Mr Trump insists a wall is still necessary to stem a “humanitarian and national security crisis” in the region.

Public support for a border wall has shifted considerably over the past few years as it became a centrepiece of the Trump agenda. The poll found that 41 per cent of the public support building additional border fencing, down 12 points from a similar poll that ran in the first week of 2015, as opposition doubled among Democrats.

It also found that only 35 per cent of adults in the US support a congressional spending Bill that includes funding for the wall, and just 25 per cent support Mr Trump’s decision to keep the government closed until Congress approves funding for the wall.

The Reuters-Ipsos poll was conducted online throughout the US. It gathered responses from 2,203 adults, including 722 Republicans and 867 Democrats. The poll has a credibility interval, a measure of precision, of 2 percentage points.

REUTERS

# 51%

Percentage of adults, from a national opinion poll which ran from Jan 1 to Jan 7, who believe Mr Trump “deserves most of the blame” for the shutdown, which entered its 19th day yesterday.

# Deadlock continues despite pleas from Trump, Democrats

Both sides stand their ground on border wall funding in back-to-back TV addresses

Charissa Yong  
US Correspondent  
In Washington

The three-week impasse that has crippled the United States federal government showed no signs of breaking despite pleas on prime-time TV by President Donald Trump and Democrat leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer on Tuesday evening.

In back-to-back televised addresses, both sides stood their ground on border wall funding – the proposed policy at the centre of a political disagreement that has kept large swathes of the US government shut down for 19 days and counting.

In his first Oval Office address to the nation, Mr Trump painted the

picture of a growing humanitarian and security crisis at the Mexican border in a direct appeal to the American public for support for a border wall, blaming Democrats for the shutdown because of their refusal to fund the wall.

Democrat leaders immediately fired back, with House leader Ms Pelosi rejecting the crisis as being manufactured by them and saying that the President’s comments were full of misinformation.

The meeting between Mr Trump and congressional leaders scheduled for yesterday afternoon (this morning, Singapore time) in the White House is unlikely to resolve the situation before the President makes a trip to the border the next day.

Mr Trump, along with Vice-President Mike Pence, was also to meet

Senate Republicans yesterday in an effort to shore up support for his refusal to budge over wall-funding.

The American public is showing signs of tiring of the shutdown, now tied for the second-longest in US history.

A Reuters poll on Tuesday had 51 per cent of Americans blaming Mr Trump for the shutdown, compared with 32 per cent who blamed the Democrats and 7 per cent pointing the finger at Republicans.

The 800,000 federal workers placed on leave or working without pay due to the shutdown will also feel the pinch, particularly tomorrow – their first payday without a full pay cheque.

Mr Trump made no mention of them in his nine-minute speech, calling the US-Mexico border a pipeline for vast quantities of illegal drugs and thousands of illegal immigrants – both of which were harming and even killing Americans, he said.

“How much more American blood must we shed before Con-

gress does its job?” he said.

Mr Trump repeated his request for US\$5.7 billion (\$57.7 billion) from Congress for a physical barrier.

He also argued that the border wall would “very quickly pay for itself” because the cost of illegal drugs exceeded US\$500 billion a year, and also indirectly by the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement trade deal.

The Washington Post wrote that Mr Trump’s claim that the trade deal would pay for the border wall betrayed a misunderstanding of economics.

Ms Pelosi, responding from Capitol Hill alongside Senate minority leader Mr Schumer moments after Mr Trump’s speech, said that Democrats agreed on the need to secure America’s borders. She noted that the House Democrats had passed legislation on the first day of Congress on Jan 3 to reopen government and fund border security solutions, but Mr Trump had rejected these bipartisan Bills.

Highlighting the plight of cash-strapped federal workers, Mr Schumer said: “No president should pound the table and demand he gets his way or else the government shuts down, hurting millions of Americans who are treated as leverage.”

He urged Mr Trump to separate the shutdown from the arguments over border security, highlighting bipartisan legislation to reopen government while allowing debate over border security to continue as a possible solution to the impasse.

Reuters reported that Senate Republicans are expected to hold firm and back the President for now despite warnings that the public’s patience is wearing thin. But their Democrat counterparts are mulling over whether to adopt a strategy of blocking more legislation in the Senate in protest against Mr Trump’s demands and to pressure him to end the shutdown, reported CNN.

charyong@sph.com.sg



(Above) A section of the US-Mexico border fence seen from Tijuana, Mexico. President Donald Trump called the border a pipeline for drugs and illegal immigrants.

(Left) Customers at a California bar watching Mr Trump’s first Oval Office address to the nation on Tuesday. PHOTOS: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Trump campaign chief gave poll info to Russian: Court papers

WASHINGTON • As a top official in United States President Donald Trump’s campaign team, Paul Manafort shared political polling data with a business associate tied to Russian intelligence, according to a court filing unsealed on Tuesday.

The document provided the clearest evidence to date that the Trump campaign may have tried to coordinate with Russians during the 2016 presidential race.

Manafort’s lawyers made the disclosure by accident, through a formatting error in a document filed to respond to charges that he had lied to prosecutors working for the special counsel, Mr Robert Mueller, after agreeing to cooperate with their investigation into Russian interference in the election.



Paul Manafort has been in jail since mid-June. He faces at least 10 years in prison.

The document also revealed that during the campaign, Manafort and his Russian associate, Mr Konstantin Kilimnik, discussed a plan for peace in Ukraine.

Throughout the campaign and the early days of the Trump administration, Russia and its allies were pushing various plans for Ukraine, in the hope of gaining relief from US-led sanctions imposed after it annexed Crimea from Ukraine.

Prosecutors and the news media have documented a string of encounters between Russian operatives and Trump campaign associates dating from the early months of Mr Trump’s bid for the presidency, including the now-famous meeting at Trump Tower in Manhattan with a Russian lawyer promising damaging information on Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

The accidental disclosure appeared to some experts to be perhaps most damning of all.

“This is the closest thing we have seen to collusion,” Mr Clint Watts, a senior fellow with the Foreign Policy Research Institute, said of the data-sharing. “The question now is, did the President know about it?”

From March to August 2016, when Manafort worked for the Trump campaign, Russia was engaged in a full-fledged operation using social media, stolen e-mails and other tactics to boost Mr Trump, attack Mrs Clinton and play on divisive issues such as race and guns.

Polling data could conceivably have helped Russia hone those messages and target audiences to help swing votes to Mr Trump.

Both Manafort and deputy campaign manager Rick Gates transferred the data to Mr Kilimnik in the spring of 2016 as Mr Trump clinched the Republican presidential nomination, said a source.

Some of the data was developed by a private polling firm working for the campaign, the source said.

Manafort asked Gates to tell Mr Kilimnik to pass the data to Mr Oleg Deripaska, a Russian oligarch who is close to the Kremlin and who has claimed that Manafort owed him money from a failed business venture, the source added.

It is unclear whether Manafort was acting at the campaign’s behest or independently, trying to gain favour with someone to whom he was deeply in debt.

Manafort, 69, has been in jail in Northern Virginia since mid-June. One prosecution resulted in his jury conviction in August for bank fraud, tax fraud and other financial crimes. A second led to his guilty plea in September on two conspiracy charges, including one stemming from a witness-tampering scheme with Mr Kilimnik. Manafort faces at least 10 years in prison. NYTIMES

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# Suspicious packages sent to consulates

More than a dozen foreign missions in major Australian cities targeted within a few hours

MELBOURNE • Suspicious packages were sent to more than a dozen foreign embassies and consulates in major Australian cities yesterday in a seemingly orchestrated but scattershot campaign. Emergency services raced to a

string of diplomatic facilities which had received packages containing suspected hazardous material, all within the space of a few hours. There was no obvious pattern to countries targeted, with consulates of the United States, China, Italy, In-

dia, Japan and New Zealand suffering scares. The packages were not believed to be dangerous, but police, fire crews and forensic teams were urged to use breathing apparatus as they documented and double- or triple-bagged the materials for further testing. Victoria state police said there was no threat to the public: "At this time, we believe the matter is tar-



Forensic officers remove items from the Italian consulate in Melbourne. The packages were not believed to be dangerous. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

geted and not impacting the general community." Most of the sites – also including

locations near the Spanish, Swiss, Egyptian and Pakistani consulates – were evacuated as a precaution

but have since been declared safe. A British High Commission spokesman said its consulate-general in Melbourne had been targeted, but "all our staff are safe and accounted for". The US consulate in the city said it had also received a "suspicious" package, which a spokesman said was handled in coordination with police and the fire service. Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs said it had sent a note to all diplomatic missions in the capital on Tuesday, "alerting them to the possibility of suspicious packages being delivered by mail". That warning was triggered after three earlier incidents at offices in Sydney and Canberra. Local media on Monday reported that the Argentine consulate in Sydney had received a package containing white powder. It did not test positive for toxins. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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## News analysis

# Time's running out, but UK MPs set to reject Brexit deal

PM May may resubmit same deal or opt for referendum if govt loses next week's key vote



Jonathan Eyal

Global Affairs Correspondent  
In London

The British Parliament has resumed debating Prime Minister Theresa May's plan for her country's withdrawal from the

European Union, nearly a month after she postponed a crunch vote on her proposal.

Although she has given Parliament no less than five debating days on the subject and is engaged in political arm-twisting, the odds are that when the Brexit deal is finally put to the vote in the House of Commons in London next Tuesday, it would be rejected.

The 599-page EU withdrawal agreement concluded in November between Britain and the bloc guarantees the rights of EU citizens living in Britain and British expats living on the continent; provides for a transition period to last until the

end of 2020, during which Britain will abide by all EU rules yet lose membership in European institutions; and specifies the terms of the "divorce" bill, which amounts to £39 billion (\$\$67.4 billion).

But neither the Brexit deal nor the accompanying declaration on future trade and security relations between Britain and the EU can come into force unless they are approved by the British Parliament, where just about the only consensus among MPs is that they do not like what is on offer.

Some lawmakers detest the whole concept of Brexit and would vote down any proposal, while others hate the idea of paying anything to an organisation they wish to leave.

But the key debate is over the hazy Brexit conditions, particularly over

a provision in the Brexit deal entitled the "Irish backstop", under which no final separation between the EU and the United Kingdom will take place until the thorny question of the trading status of Northern Ireland – a province which belongs to Britain – is resolved to the full satisfaction of the Irish Republic – which controls most of the island of Ireland, an EU member.

Some MPs fear this could keep Britain involved in interminable talks with the EU, while others anticipate that the Irish negotiations could create a permanent divide between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain, and unleash the break-up of the UK.

To make matters worse, Mrs May's government lacks an overall parliamentary majority and relies on the votes of 10 Northern Irish MPs,

all of whom oppose her Brexit deal.

Furthermore, party discipline in the House of Commons or Parliament has broken down. Both the ruling Conservative and the main opposition Labour party are divided on all these issues.

Mrs May had planned to use the Christmas break to persuade Brussels to make further concessions and convince MPs that the only alternative to her plan is a Brexit with no deal whatsoever, which most analysts agree would be disastrous for the British economy but something which would become inevitable if no arrangement is in place by March 29, when Britain's membership in the EU automatically expires.

But, in the early hours of yesterday, rebel MPs from both sides of Parliament inflicted a humiliating defeat on Mrs May by approving – with a majority of 303 to 296 – a Bill forcing her to ask for explicit parliamentary approval to leave the EU without a deal before it can use certain powers relating to taxation law.

In effect, this means that Mrs May cannot threaten to leave the EU without a deal, but is still no closer to getting approval for her Brexit arrangement. A more tangled political situation could have hardly been invented.

In an effort to relieve the logjam,

Mrs May's negotiators are trying to extract from the EU a promise that the Irish "backstop" will not be used, or will not be effective beyond a certain date. That, she hopes, could calm down rebel MPs.

The European Commission (EC), the bloc's executive body, may be willing to consider giving such a reassurance, but only if it can be sure that this would be the end of the haggling, and that the British Parliament would approve the deal.

However, Mrs May can give no such guarantee. So, at least for the moment, "there are no negotiations, because all we have on the table is an agreement we already consider as completed", pointed out EC chief spokesman Margaritis Schinas.

The consensus in London is that the British government will lose the key vote next Tuesday, although nobody knows what would follow next. Mrs May could simply play for time, and resubmit the same deal for further discussion. Or she may opt for a referendum, asking the public what it wants.

Either way, it is clear that time is running out to pass the literally hundreds of pieces of legislation required for Brexit. So an extension to the current negotiations with the EU is more or less inevitable.

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South Korean President Moon Jae-in (left) talking to the owner of a shoe shop in Seoul last week while having his shoes made. Mr Moon had pledged to be a "Gwanghwamun President" with his office in downtown Seoul instead of the secluded Blue House, to be closer to people on the ground. But relocation plans have been postponed indefinitely due to space issues. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

## S. Korean leader slammed for not shifting his office

Chang May Choon  
South Korea Correspondent  
In Seoul

Elected on a pledge to end his country's authoritarian leadership, South Korean President Moon Jae-in promised to shift his office from the secluded Blue House to the more accessible Gwanghwamun in

downtown Seoul so that he can work closely with government officials based there.

He would "begin an era of a Gwanghwamun President" who communicates closely and regularly with the people on the ground, he had said in his inaugural speech.

That dream – one that he has harboured since he was a key aide to the late former president Roh Moo-

hyun (2003-2008) – was all but shattered with Blue House's recent announcement that the relocation had been shelved due to space issues.

An official said last Friday that the authorities have "reached the conclusion that there is no alternative space in the current government building complex at Gwanghwamun that can be used as key facilities to replace the Blue House's main hall, re-

ception hall, helipad, etc".

But this does not mean the pledge is withdrawn. The official said the project will be reviewed in the future, depending on ongoing plans to revamp Gwanghwamun.

The announcement came as Mr Moon prepares to enter the third year of his five-year term at a time when his approval rating has hit an all-time low of 45.9 per cent, largely

due to his administration's failed economic policies and stalled denuclearisation talks with North Korea.

Observers warn that the decision is no different from a broken promise, and it could drive his popularity down further.

Attacks from the opposition came fast and furious, with Party for Democracy and Peace's spokesman Kim Jung-hyun de-

manding an apology and explanation from Mr Moon.

Lawmaker Lee Che-ik of the main opposition Liberty Korea Party said at a press conference on Monday that Mr Moon has "deceived the people" with a pledge that was "populist and unrealistic in the first place".

"Dragging it for two years shows the government's incompetence, ignorance and irresponsibility," he added.

Former prime minister Hwang Kyo-ahn weighed in, pointing out that Mr Moon has worked in the Blue House "long enough to know how complex the security and protocols for a president are".

Major daily newspaper JoongAng Ilbo went as far as calling the "Gwanghwamun President" pledge a "fantasy" in a commentary, urging the need to explain why it was made without proper review.

"The pledge made by the president of a country cannot be mere ideology," it added.

Dr Lee Jae-hyon of The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, however, argued that Mr Moon has already done more than his predecessors in reaching out to the people.

For one, Mr Moon has lifted a 49-year-old rule to close the road in front of the Blue House at night, so people can now enjoy an evening stroll right outside his home and workplace.

He also met a group of 30 citizens at a Gwanghwamun pub last July to hear their concerns about a planned minimum wage hike.

Dr Lee said the "Gwanghwamun President" pledge had good intentions and people appreciated it.

"What is important is not moving out to Gwanghwamun or not, but the President's sincerity," he told The Straits Times.

If a poll by Internet news site Dailian is any indication, most people are not bothered.

Its survey of 1,018 people showed that 65.1 per cent agree with the idea of scrapping the relocation to Gwanghwamun if it is not economically feasible, as opposed to 23.3 per cent who want Mr Moon to keep his promise. The rest are "not sure".

Netizen commented: "I'll be supportive as long as the government can communicate with the people."

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### Strikes at major German airports today



Thousands of passengers in Germany face disruption today following a strike call by security staff at three major airports, the powerful Verdi union said. The walkout was to begin at 3am in the airports of Dusseldorf, Cologne Bonn and Stuttgart, and is to continue until midnight. A warning strike took place on Monday morning at Berlin's two airports – Tegel (above) and Schoenefeld – forcing the cancellation of about 50 flights. Verdi, which represents 23,000 airport security personnel, wants wages raised to €20 (\$31) an hour from around €17 currently. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Police, military probe drone disruption at Heathrow airport

LONDON • Flights from London's Heathrow airport were halted for about an hour on Tuesday after a drone was sighted near Europe's busiest air hub, raising fears that the chaos that affected rival Gatwick last month could be repeated on an even larger scale.

"We are responding to a drone sighting at Heathrow," the airport said. "As a precautionary measure, we have stopped departures while we investigate. We apologise to passengers for any inconvenience this may cause."

London's Metropolitan Police said they had received reports of a drone near the airport at about 1705 GMT on Tuesday (1.05 am yesterday, Singapore time) which they were investigating with the airport authorities. It said police officers were among those who reported seeing a drone and it had launched a criminal investigation.

The airport confirmed about an hour later that take-offs had resumed. Flight tracker websites showed flights departing from 1811 GMT. A Reuters witness in a plane on the runway at Heathrow said multiple aircraft were waiting for permission to take off before being later told that things were starting to move.

London's second-busiest airport, Gatwick, was severely disrupted when drones were sighted on three consecutive days last month, resulting in about 1,000 flights being cancelled or diverted and affecting 140,000 passengers.

London's Metropolitan Police said military assistance had been provided to help it deal with the incident at Heathrow.

Police said they were carrying out extensive searches around the Heathrow area to identify any people who may be responsible for the

operation of the drone.

"We are deploying significant resources – both in terms of officers and equipment – to monitor the airspace around Heathrow and to quickly detect and disrupt any illegal drone activity, some of which are as a result of learning from the incidents at Gatwick," police commander Stuart Cundy said.

Airport operators need to do more to counter the illegal use of drones, Prime Minister Theresa May's de facto deputy said yesterday. Cabinet Office Minister David Lidington said the government would consider toughening laws that ban the use of drones near airports, but operators could also invest more in protection systems.

Gatwick Airport said it had upgraded its systems, while Heathrow said it was working with the authorities to keep the airport secure. REUTERS



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# Patience needed in the Taiwan Strait

Chinese President Xi Jinping’s message to the Taiwanese on the second day of the new year did much to clarify China’s stand on the cross-strait issue. But it did little to stabilise the fraught relations between the mainland and the island that Beijing considers to be a breakaway province. Taiwan has been ruled separately since 1949 when the Kuomintang (KMT) government fled there after losing the civil war to the Chinese Communist Party. Cross-strait ties have gone through good and bad patches since then. The eight years under the KMT’s China-friendly Ma Ying-jeou from 2008 to 2016 saw stability and progress in the form of agreements that promoted exchanges. This progress was predicated on the acceptance

of the 1992 Consensus, a tacit understanding that there is only one China and that either side is free to interpret what this means. The “consensus” with its ambiguity allowed both sides to set aside differences and focus on areas where ties could be improved. The detente did not last, however. President Tsai Ing-wen of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party rejected the 1992 Consensus when she came to power in 2016, leading to a deterioration in relations as Beijing severed official ties with Taiwan. Mr Xi’s speech on Jan 2 gave a new twist to the 1992 Consensus that left little room for imagination or manoeuvrability. He rendered it as a consensus that “the two sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China,

jointly seeking to achieve cross-strait reunification”. He proposed, for reunification, the “one country, two systems” formula under which Hong Kong and Macau returned to China’s fold. Unsurprisingly, both were rejected by Ms Tsai. Even KMT stalwarts criticised the new rendition of the 1992 Consensus. As for the Taiwanese public, polls showed it rejected Mr Xi’s proposal too. While the Taiwanese are ready to engage China for economic benefits, they value their democratic freedoms too much to conceive of returning to the motherland under one country, two systems, having seen how Hong Kongers’ freedoms have been increasingly constricted under it. Mr Xi is also hardening the stance of the Taiwanese

government by bypassing it and appealing directly to different sectors of Taiwanese society to join Beijing to set up a mechanism for negotiation. Into this unhappy situation comes the United States, which under President Donald Trump appears inclined to use Taiwan as a bargaining chip in its ties with China – it passed an Act that supports the sale of arms to Taiwan on a regular basis. All this makes for a volatile Taiwan Strait in the months to come unless cool heads prevail. While Mr Xi with his road map for reunification displays some impatience, the opposite is needed if peaceful reunification is his goal and if there is to be stability in the region. And perhaps a return to the drawing board for a plan more acceptable to all.



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

HomeFront

# Cranking up safety for cyclists on roads

Two-wheeler transport is increasingly vying for space with motor vehicles. Tempers are fraying on both sides. What solutions are there, particularly from cyclists?



Zaihan Mohamed Yusof

Road rage between cyclists and motorists has been in the spotlight. One of the most recent incidents took place last month when a dashboard camera caught a skirmish between a cyclist and a mini-lorry driver near a junction in Pasir Ris Rise that was shared on the Internet. Footage of quite a few recent two-wheeler incidents shows riders taking matters into their own hands when supposedly provoked. Another recent clip has a food-delivery motorcyclist kicking a van’s door in Katong. Since such incidents involve both cyclists or motorbike riders and vehicle drivers, there is a need for dialogue on a national level, said road safety experts and cyclists The Straits Times spoke to. For Mr Bernard Tay, chairman of the Singapore Road Safety Council

(SRSC), playing the blame game is pointless. “Enough with the finger-pointing, as the matter is for the police to investigate,” said Mr Tay, referring to the Pasir Ris Rise incident which saw both parties arrested. “What is crucial is: How do we get the road safety message out so that cyclists and other road users can coexist without much frustration or danger to themselves?”

**UPHILL TASK**

One target group for such outreach is cyclists, given that their number is on the rise. But the task of reaching out and educating cyclists may be akin to pedalling uphill, said Mr Junaidi Hashim, a competitive road cyclist who has raced in Japan, Thailand, China and Australia. Mr Junaidi, 36, said: “There are road cyclists who ride round-island on weekends and there are cyclists who don’t belong to any group because they cycle only for transport. The cycling scene is fragmented.” Unlike motorists, there is no registry to track bicycle owners. The Land Transport Authority (LTA) said in 2016 that it had studied the licensing of bicycles and cyclists, adding it “will be resource-intensive to implement and police a system to

license bicycles or cyclists that is up to date”. And the number getting on their bikes is growing: It was reported in Parliament last March that one in four households here owns bicycles, with 125,000 people using bicycles for daily commutes. Indeed, last year, the Government announced that it would now be a requirement for all new private developments to provide bicycle parking spaces. Under the National Cycling Plan, agencies such as the LTA, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, National Parks Board, the Housing Board (HDB), national water agency PUB and Sport Singapore will strive to make cycling a safe, healthy and convenient transport option for Singaporeans. According to the Ministry of Transport, the islandwide cycling path network will have reached 700km by 2030, with the long-term aim of providing all 26 HDB towns with a “comprehensive cycling network so residents can easily and safely cycle to MRT stations and neighbourhood centres”. Under the car-lite vision, these paths will also be used by riders of power-assisted bicycles (PABs), e-scooters and bicycles. However, serious road cyclists

are less likely to use shared paths because of the mix of slower two-wheelers and pedestrians. Most cycle on roads such as Lim Chu Kang Road, Tanah Merah Coast Road, Mandai Road and the Pasir Ris Rise stretch that saw the altercation between the cyclist and mini-lorry driver last month. Road cyclists can hit an average speed of 45kmh on their bikes – which often are not cheap, costing anything from \$2,500 to more than \$10,000. Often, they coexist happily on Singapore roads simply by cycling when there is less traffic. They can be seen out as early as 4.30am. They aim to get off the roads by 7.30am when traffic builds up on weekdays. For cyclist Tony Toh, who works in the finance industry, it is all about cycling with the right attitude, given that the total vehicle population has increased – from 851,336 in 2007 to 961,842 in 2017. Mr Toh, 52, said: “While it may be your right of way to ride two abreast on certain roads, it would be more considerate to ride single file when traffic is heavy. The last thing you want is for a frustrated and indecisive lorry driver to make a close pass.”

**CYCLISTS’ RAGE**

But where does all the rage come from that may cause a cyclist to confront motorists? Said Mr Junaidi: “When you’re pushed into a corner or get a close shave, it’s understandable that you will fly into a rage and confront a motorist. But I advise my fellow riders not to go there, because it will only turn out bad.” To stay safe and be seen, some cyclists practise “owning a lane” by not cycling too close to the kerb. TV host Bobby Tonelli, an avid road cyclist, uses a sensing device that alerts him to approaching vehicles from the rear. But occasionally, he gets surprised by motorists who honk aggressively when overtaking. Mr Tonelli said: “Both motorists and cyclists must learn to be patient and share our roads, and not use them as though they’re self-entitled to do so.” He also adopts the practice of high visibility, with bright gear and equipment so he is “lit like a Christmas tree”. Added Mr Tonelli: “The Pasir Ris incident showed there was a lot of uncertainty within the cycling fraternity when it comes to cycling rules.

“Chances are, if a cyclist is not a motorist who has taken a Highway Code test, the cyclist will not know what is allowed or prohibited on roads. Perhaps we need a version of the Highway Code for cyclists.” There are rules and codes of conduct under the Active Mobility Act for cyclists, and riders of personal mobility devices (PMDs) and PABs. These include no riding of PMDs on public roads, dismounting from a bicycle or PMD when you spot “No Riding” signs, and cycling in a single file on single-lane roads and during bus lane operational hours. In the meantime, the cycling fraternity is not short on ideas on how to make cycling on the roads safer. Mr Junaidi and a few other cyclists said the authorities should make it mandatory for new bicycle owners to receive road-safety brochures from bicycle shops.

Others are open to the idea of a quick registration process where you register a new bicycle on an app, after which you simply read road safety rules or watch safety videos. But some oppose such ideas, fearing they would act as pre-conditions or a form of licensing before one is allowed to cycle on roads. Distributing brochures is one of the ways the Singapore Cycling Federation (SCF) raises road safety awareness. The SCF told The Straits Times that for about a year now, it has reached out to sections of society, from shipyard workers to corporate bodies, that want their staff to be safer cyclists. Fundamentally, the SCF, which has about 40 cycling clubs under its wing, believes in inculcating safe cycling habits at an early age, with its customisable Singapore Cycle Safe programme conducted for schoolchildren. However, such programmes are held on an ad hoc basis, with limited reach, some argue. SCF general manager Mahipal Singh said: “We believe in the ‘light touch’ to cycling education and training. “We’re not out to make every student a champion rider – we want to make them safer cyclists.” The Netherlands model shows that cycling can be safe if there is a robust support structure and infrastructure. Out of a population of 16.6 million people there, 99 per cent are cyclists. Their two-wheel education starts early in school, with fun cycling apps about safety. In Singapore, where the climate is hot and humid, cycling may not be for everybody. The key is to come up with a way of reaching those who do take up cycling, at optimal touch points, to inculcate safe riding habits. One is when someone buys a bicycle. Another is to work with companies that promote riding to work. As road safety is a shared concept, Mr Lee Wai Mun, chief executive of the Automobile Association of Singapore, said other motorists should go through refresher courses to tackle the issue from another angle. An example is the association’s crash prevention courses for heavy-vehicle drivers to raise their level of road awareness, especially when driving in the presence of two-wheelers. Mr Lee said: “This group of cyclists and personal mobility device users are now a phenomenon that’s falling through the cracks. No one is looking at them. The bigger picture is: How do we mitigate everything to make the roads safe?” While there have been focus group discussions on the safe use of bicycles and personal mobility devices on shared pathways, finding solutions to road safety for cyclists will take time, said SRSC’s Mr Tay. Yet, he is inviting interested stakeholders to take a stand on cycling road safety. “They (cyclists) are a very fragmented group,” said Mr Tay. “But if you approach us as a group, we can work something out to promote road safety. This is our job.”





The Ministry of Health has often said that MediShield Life claim limits are meant to cover nine in 10 of subsidised bills. But increasingly, one has to ask if that is enough, says the writer. If there are half a million claims a year, 10 per cent of bills not covered could amount to at least 50,000 – not a small number. ST FILE PHOTO

MediShield Life payouts

# For true peace of mind, limit patients’ exposure to big bills

Claim limits protect MediShield Life from excessive claims. How about protecting patients’ share too?

Jeremy Lim

For The Straits Times

The recent fracas over the small insurance payout for a complex operation at the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) (“MediShield Life paid just \$4.50 of senior’s \$4,477 post-subsidy bill”; The Straits Times, Dec 31, 2018) has shone the spotlight on the adequacy of Singapore’s national health insurance scheme.

When MediShield Life was launched in 2015, the Government anticipated that, in exchange for higher premiums, Singaporeans could expect to “reduce co-insurance rates from the current 10 to 20 per cent to 3 to 10 per cent” if using subsidised healthcare services.

However, in this case, it was not to be. The total bill was over \$12,000 but after government subsidies, it came to \$4,477.

Of this amount, most of it was paid using the patient’s own Medisave, which is an individual health savings account. The national insurance plan MediShield Life paid \$4.50.

In response, the Ministry of Health (MOH) said: “When MediShield Life was launched in 2015, the claim limits were set to cover nine out of 10 subsidised bills.

“Based on latest available figures, eight in 10 subsidised bills were within the MediShield Life claim limits, and nine in 10 were within \$230 of the claim limits.”

Nonetheless, it said that it would conduct a review of claim limits and premiums by end-2020.

The SNEC explained further that the case was complex and required a three-hour operation, hence the higher charges.

Reactions have been heated over this issue, with questions raised over whether MediShield Life payouts are too low even for subsidised bills, and whether SNEC and other national health centres such as the cancer, heart and skin centres are charging too-high fees that are above MediShield Life claim limits.

But it is useful to take a step back and examine three “hard truths” behind national health insurance schemes.

NOT TOO HOT, NOT TOO COLD

Just as Goldilocks’ ideal porridge was not too hot and not too cold, MediShield Life has to straddle a fine line to achieve both financial and political sustainability.

The scheme has to be designed to financially endure for decades, meaning that premiums must be greater than claims and anticipated claims.

However, it must also pay out sufficiently so that citizens’ out-of-pocket expenses are affordable.

Affordability here is nuanced – what is deemed affordable at the peak of one’s career and income would be very different from a retiree’s notion.

Failure to strike that right balance in either direction is disastrous.

Constant deficits and the scheme will eventually collapse. But too tight-wadded a philosophy, and more and more instances of modest payouts way smaller than the actual bills, and Singaporeans will lose the “peace of mind” that was a key motivation behind MediShield Life in the first place.

‘NINE IN 10’ MAY NOT BE GOOD ENOUGH

MOH has often repeated its pledge that MediShield Life claim limits are meant to cover nine in 10 of subsidised bills. But increasingly, one has to ask if that is enough.

If there are half a million claims a year, 10 per cent of bills not covered could amount to at least 50,000 – not a small number.

Expectations are understandably high for a compulsory scheme.

My view is that the scheme has to work not at 90 per cent, but at 99.9 per cent.

I think Singaporeans are reasonable enough to understand that no policy or scheme can cover every situation. But Singaporeans can and should expect that the rare case which falls through the cracks is identified proactively with speedy and fair resolution.

It cannot be that Singaporeans who dutifully follow the Government’s advice to seek subsidised care and trust the Government’s assurances that MediShield Life offers “Better Protection. For All. For Life”, then have to appeal for what should rightfully be expected.

UNCERTAINTY A ZERO-SUM GAME

The stark reality is that insurance is about uncertainty and someone or some entity needs to take on this risk. In MediShield Life, this risk is arguably stacked against individual citizens.

There are claim limits such as \$100,000 per year in total and \$200 for Table 1 (less complex) procedures. These claim limits serve to “protect” the scheme from too-large payouts.

But there is no equivalent maximum limit to likewise “protect” citizens’ exposure to large bills. In some national health insurance plans overseas, patients’ maximum out-of-pocket expenses are capped per year, and amounts above that are drawn from the

insurance or other state fund.

But the reality is that we cannot fully protect both the scheme and citizens.

When it comes to very large bills, someone has to pick up the tab and bear the risk – MediShield Life, individual citizens or some other state-supported fund.

LESSONS FROM SNEC CASE

With this background, what can we learn from the SNEC episode?

First, the public expectation as suggested by the furore is that MediShield Life should pay out a substantial proportion of the total amount that patients have to pay.

The public may not understand sub-limits or the need for them.

The public just wants “peace of mind”; the confidence that in public-sector healthcare institutions, we will be clinically well taken care of; and that financially, Medisave, MediShield Life and some modest out-of-pocket payments will be all that are needed.

The assumption that public hospitals price subsidised care reasonably is a fair one, as is the assumption that MediShield Life claim limits are sized to what patients need to pay.

After all, the MediShield Life website states “MediShield Life payouts are pegged at B2/C-type wards in public hospitals”.

The fact that the SNEC case was complex and required a three-hour procedure is no reason for a small payout. This is exactly the sort of care episode MediShield Life should be designed for.

Second, MediShield Life is a new scheme and cases such as this are to some extent inevitable.

What then matters is identifying them early, applying human judgment on the appropriateness of the payout based on the existing

rules and whether to override.

And after addressing the specific case, review and determine whether there are lessons that can be applied system-wide, so that everyone can benefit.

MOH has said it would conduct a review by the end of next year, but with more than \$1.5 billion already paid out to over 200,000 Singaporeans, surely there is enough experience to start identifying gaps and improving the scheme?

Health Minister Gan Kim Yong previously assured Singaporeans that while “hiccups” were unavoidable, MOH would “do our best to fix them as quickly as we can”. Asking the public to wait two years may not be palatable.

Like it or not, public confidence in MediShield Life has been shaken by this episode. The goodwill generated during the build-up back in 2014, including the Government’s earlier announcement of almost \$4 billion in premium subsidies and other support, has been somewhat eroded. What can be done?

That Singaporeans accept the need for deductibles and co-payments to prevent “moral hazard” or abuse is not in doubt, but should co-payments be open-ended, especially when MediShield Life has billions in reserves and administrators can raise premiums as needed?

Just as claim limits “protect” the financial sustainability of the MediShield Life system, perhaps it is time for a serious discussion on whether there should be co-payment limits to “protect” the financial security of individuals and households, especially when there is a risk of financial hardship or, worse, bankruptcy from large medical bills.

“Peace of mind” is central to the success of MediShield Life. Perhaps some form of cap on the proportion of the total bill that patients pay should be explored?

Or a cap on co-payments by patients? Many other countries design their national insurance schemes to include both, including the Austrians, the Finns and the Germans.

MediShield Life is a key pillar of our national healthcare financing framework. Mr Gan, speaking in Parliament in 2015, described the MediShield Life scheme as “the embodiment of Singaporeans’ aspiration for a more inclusive, caring and progressive society”.

We cannot let trust in this vital institution be weakened further and I hope the Government will move decisively to restore confidence.

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## S’pore’s flourishing religious minorities a lesson for the world

Peter Welby

For The Straits Times

In a decade of work in the field of religion and global affairs, I have never come across a religious minority so comfortable in its own skin, and so conscious of the vital role it plays in the wider national tapestry, as Muslims in Singapore.

A conference held last November marked the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis), jointly organised with the Forum for Promoting Peace, led by Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah, one of the world’s leading Islamic scholars. Its theme was the engagement of Singapore’s Muslims in the country’s unique secular, plural system and whether there were lessons for the rest of the world.

As Shaykh Abdallah said: “Every citizen has exactly the same rights and responsibilities as every other citizen.” This is a phenomenon to be praised – but also to be emulated.

Muis is an unusual body, virtually unknown in other similarly minority contexts: It is indisputably a government organisation, set up by statute in order to advise the President on Islamic affairs and administer the key areas of Muslim religious life – charity, worship, religious education and pilgrimage. But at the same time it is a service body, set up for the benefit of the country’s Muslims, not as a means for their control; and a community body, largely funded by Singapore’s Muslims and managing community assets.

This set-up could be a consequence of history: Muslims in Singapore have not always been a “minority community”. The brief period of Singapore’s merger with Malaysia put those who follow Islam in the national majority. Muis was set up three years after the end of the merger experiment, and the trauma of the experience makes the current set-up all the more impressive.

The recent conference was the culmination of years of activity – a culmination that reaffirmed the Muslim community’s integral place in the state. The keynote speech was given by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in testimony to the good relationship between Singapore’s Muslim community and the state.

What made this conference unique was the picture it painted of Singaporean society: a society at ease with itself. In much of the Western world, societies are increasingly ill at ease with the interaction between citizenship and identity, particularly around religion and culture. Islam in particular is seen by many, both inside and outside the faith, as something alien to Western society – to be kept at arm’s length and possibly even dangerous. Debates around securitisation and extremism are often perceived as part of this alienation.

Not, seemingly, in Singapore.

The Republic is unique for a host of reasons. For one thing, there are few remaining fully independent city states in the world and Singapore is the only one of those to have emerged from colonialism. The end of the colonial period and the early post-colonial era were times of great hardship for the country. Out of that, its leaders determined that the answer to its external weakness must lie in internal strength: a nation made up of many ethnicities and religions, but in national vision, one.

Many claim to be defined by a principle of unity in diversity; in Singapore, it feels real.

THE CONCEPT OF SHARED VALUES

Given, then, the difference of Singapore to much of the rest of the world, what is there for the rest of us to learn? One area is shared values. The UK, after 2010, briefly had a counter-terrorism strategy that defined extremism as the “rejection of fundamental British values”. As a definition, this was pointless – for one thing, it had little cross-border efficacy, being focused on the UK.

For another, all it defined was what extremism is not. But it did speak to something of a need in a cohesive society to have something that all citizens can unite around. In the case of the British definition, these values were democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of others.

I wouldn’t suggest that these aren’t good things, but they do seem a slightly odd collection (not least because individual liberty should broadly cover tolerance of others). Perhaps a different approach would be to consider the sources of shared values as a nation.

The UK, for instance, is characterised in law and (changing) culture by a historically Christian world view. Even in an increasingly secular society, this brings a certain amount of common understanding. Much of Islam’s approach to ethics, when stripped down to its fundamentals, is not that different.

From those sources, then, the concept of “fundamental British values” could be revisited. Why believe in democracy and individual liberty? Because of what the Christian tradition teaches about the inherent, God-given dignity of the human being – a view shared by Muslims. Why believe in the rule of law? Because in the Christian tradition, God demands justice – a view shared by Muslims.

This approach to identifying the source of national values rather than simply stating them will help with unity – and will help minority groups feel that they have a stake in the national identity.

Singapore’s pluralism already follows this approach. The values that are apparent, such as a deliberate aspiration to national solidarity, are derived from values all its constituent parts can justify on their own terms.

Singapore’s national solidarity is to the benefit of all of its communities; it allows religious freedom without allowing any one to dominate another. This isn’t secularism driving religion out of the public sphere; rather it is the needs of the various constituent communities working together for mutual benefit.

Other countries should learn from this lesson.

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# Farmers count the cost of US-China trade war

America's soya bean exports to the world's biggest market have all but disappeared, leaving farmers dependent on a US\$12 billion bailout

Gregory Meyer

The final 230 miles of the Mississippi river have long reinforced American might in global food markets. Ten grain terminals tower like fortresses along its bends, receiving crops from upstream farms, banking them in concrete silos and sending them over the levees into the holds of foreign ships. Together they can export 500,000 tonnes a day.

Yet this year the autumn high season never came. The amount of grain and oilseeds moving through Mississippi river ports has dropped by 9 per cent since the autumn of 2017, according to the Federal Grain Inspection Service. Buoys for mooring vessels bob unused.

Cargill, the world's biggest agricultural trading house, repeatedly idled its two terminals on the river, including a five-day shutdown in November when workers stayed home unpaid.

"We've never done that (before)," says Mr Jeremy Seyfert, the terminal manager. "We had the ability to take the plant down for five days because we didn't have anything to load." Between September and December, soya bean volumes shipped through Cargill's river terminals in Louisiana were down 40 per cent year on year, Mr Seyfert says.

The disruption at the mouth of the Mississippi is an acute result of the United States-China trade war. After US President Donald Trump imposed new tariffs on Chinese goods, Beijing punched back with duties on US exports, including most of its US\$20 billion (\$\$27 billion) in agricultural commodity sales.

Soya bean exports, worth US\$12 billion in 2017, were hit hardest. The oilseed's conquest of farm fields in the past 20 years has largely been down to US farmers gambling on China's demand for protein to nourish pigs and chickens. Beijing raised tariffs on soya beans by 25 percentage points in July, pricing the US crop out of the world's largest market and making it a symbol of deteriorating

bilateral relations.

"As soya beans have remained the most exposed commodity in the trade war, investors should monitor this market in assessing the state of Sino-US trade negotiations," says Citigroup.

Soya bean prices depressed by the dispute remain weak, reflecting low expectations even as US and Chinese officials resumed trade talks on Monday. Exporters are focusing their attention on other markets. Soya bean stockpiles are clogged up and down the Mississippi, upsetting rhythms of the crop calendar at a multibillion-dollar cost to American farmers and taxpayers.

Hopes rose in the US farm belt after Mr Trump and President Xi Jinping of China met in Buenos Aires towards the end of last year and agreed not to escalate their dispute for 90 days, a period that ends on March 2. Beijing has in recent weeks purchased a few million tonnes of soya beans for its government reserve, in a sign of goodwill.

Yet the market is sceptical about the possibility of a permanent detente.

"The reality is that we're in the early stages of a new cold war," says Mr Jan Lambregts, global head of financial markets research at Rabobank, a lender to the food and agriculture sector. "China has thrown down the gauntlet: They want to be No. 1. The US has responded saying that's not going to happen... Within that context, there is no way I can see a lasting deal."

## BEIJING DIVERSIFIES SUPPLY

Even if Beijing and Washington make peace, the effects of the 2018 soya bean showdown will endure. Market veterans recall how a 1973 US embargo on soya bean exports sparked Brazil's ascent as a major player in the sector. "Once you are branded with the scarlet letter of being an unreliable supplier, it is hard to completely regain those lost sales," says Dr Scott Irwin, a University of Illinois agricultural economist.

Food security is a priority for Beijing. So uncertainty over US relations may cause it to further diversify its soya bean sources.

"No doubt in my mind, this will have some sort of long-term impact," says Mr Jim Sutter, chief executive of the US Soybean Export Council, a trade promotion body. "We're going to do all we can to try and minimise the long-term

damage in China, but after the 90-day period is over, I don't think we'll wake up and go back to normal."

The council has requested government funding to develop fast-growing alternative markets such as India and Nigeria. "We're trying to make sure we're going to new markets, reducing, perhaps, our dependency on a particular large market," Mr Sutter says.

For the year up to Sept 30, China imported 94 million tonnes of soya beans, more than a third of it from the US. For the year that began on Oct 1, US government economists forecast China will import 90 million tonnes, the first decline in 15 years.

The US has captured very little of that demand. From Sept 1 to mid-December, US exports of soya beans to China had amounted to just 341,000 tonnes, compared with 18 million tonnes in the same period of 2017, US Agriculture Department data shows. Meanwhile, US farmers have hauled in what is estimated to be a record 125 million tonne crop.

The partial government shutdown over Mr Trump's proposed border wall has prevented the release of more recent official data on US exports.

China looks able to make do with minimal amounts of US soya beans until new supplies begin streaming in from South America. Its own reserves were already high when the China Feed Industry Association in October lowered the protein standard for pig and poultry feed.

If fully embraced, the policy will reduce the country's annual soya bean demand by 14 million tonnes, says Ms Chenjun Pan, a Rabobank analyst in Hong Kong. Further reducing millions of tonnes of demand, an African swine fever outbreak has led China's livestock farmers to cull pig herds.

Last summer, China ended duties on soya beans and rapeseed – another protein-rich oilseed – from five Asian countries, including India. It later reopened its market to Indian-crushed rapeseed meal, dismissing earlier quibbles about its quality.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he wants to sell more soya beans to China, and in November a queue several kilometres long formed at Russia's easternmost border crossings as a "massive supply of soy" made its way through, according to local reports cited by AgriCensus, a price

reporting agency.

The biggest winner of the trade war so far has been Brazil, as China snapped up its previous crop. Gross profit margins for farmers exceeded 50 per cent in Mato Grosso state, compared with a historical average of 30 per cent, according to Mr Guilherme Bellotti, senior agribusiness analyst at Itau BBA bank in Sao Paulo. Land planted with soya beans this year is expected to reach a record 36 million ha, adding pressure to convert more forests into cropland.

White House officials have made confident noises that China will offer big commitments to buy more American products such as soya beans, corn and dairy. Yet crop traders are wary of basing decisions on such pronouncements.

"People in the grain industry spend a lot of time forecasting real demand, real supply, consumption patterns, rainfall patterns. Those are what used to drive grain flows," says Mr Michael Ricks, the Cargill trading and merchandising manager responsible for the company's North American soya bean portfolio. "Now you've added a new element, which is geopolitical policy. And that's something that we're not at all skilled at forecasting."

## EXCESS SUPPLY

The impact of the crop back-up is visible across the US interior. Soya beans that cannot be exported have in most cases been stored in a bet on higher prices. White polyethylene bags stuffed with excess crops line fallow fields. They are cheaper in the short run than building metal storage silos, whose cost has soared because of new US tariffs on steel imports, silo manufacturers say.

Stocks of soya beans available just before the 2019 harvest will more than double year on year, the US Agriculture Department estimates. In the upper Midwest, soya bean trains that normally shuttle to Pacific ports have instead been redirected to head south-east towards the Mississippi river docks at St Louis, Missouri, says Ms Kayla Burkhardt, a grain manager at the CHS SunPrairie co-operative in North Dakota. There, they are loaded on barges lashed together and pushed by tugboats to Louisiana terminals.

Flotillas of northern soya beans in the autumn overwhelmed the local market in Louisiana, where farmers typically grow the crop alongside rice, sugarcane, cotton

and pond-raised crayfish.

Terminals, already full of supplies intended for overseas markets but which no longer had buyers, stopped purchasing Louisiana-grown varieties. More than half the crop in southern Louisiana was unmarketable or left to rot in the fields, according to the Louisiana State University's AgCenter.

Mr Damian Glaser, a farmer in New Roads, Louisiana, still had more than half of his 100,000 bushel crop – about 3,000 tonnes – unsold last month. It was the first year he chose not to sell right after harvest. "I normally don't store anything," he says.

Mr Glaser agrees with Mr Trump's position on trade. "But I don't want to go broke while he's getting it done," he says.

## BALLOUT PLAN

The Trump administration's response has been to introduce a US\$12 billion bailout scheme that includes government purchases of surplus foods, campaigns to identify new markets for crops and direct payments to farmers. Soya beans have the biggest allocation, with US\$7.3 billion of the total authorised for payment. Mr Glaser calls it "Trump money".

"Even though he's killing us right now, I think he's going to be positive in the long run for the country," he says of the President. "I was just hoping it wasn't going to last this long."

US farmers built up cash buffers during the commodity boom that ended earlier in the decade, but economic strains are building. In states of the upper Midwest – prime soya bean, corn, wheat and dairy country – banks are contending with rising levels of bad agricultural loans on their books, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

In central corn belt states, such as Iowa and Illinois, farm loan repayment rates are declining amid a "decidedly downcast outlook for agriculture", the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago reports.

The impact of the tariffs comes on top of a multiyear bear market in grain, with large crops forcing down prices.

"The longer this goes on, we're going to see bankruptcies go up and then it's going to bleed into the banking sector," says Mr Neel Kashkari, the Minneapolis Fed president. In his five-state region, 84 farms filed for chapter 12 bankruptcy protection in the 12 months to June 2018 – more than twice the level of four years earlier.

At Mr Curt Engemann's farm in Maringouin, Louisiana, the roughly US\$2-a-bushel fall in prices means about US\$260,000 in foregone revenue, he says. But he just collected a second payment under the federal aid scheme, covering most of his losses.

"I think it's worth it," he says of the trade war, adding: "If it continues in the next couple of years, call me back."

FINANCIAL TIMES

Soya bean farmer Raymond Schexnayder Jr at his farm outside Baton Rouge, in Erwinville, Louisiana. Even if Beijing and Washington make peace in the current tariff war, the effects of the 2018 soya bean showdown will endure. Food security is a priority for Beijing. So uncertainty over US relations may cause it to further diversify its soya bean sources.

PHOTO: REUTERS



# How old is too old to be US president?

Evan Thomas

How old is too old? Former vice-president Joe Biden is 76 years old and Senator Bernie Sanders is 77. Two years from now, would either man be too old to be president of the United States? Not just physically, but also culturally and temperamentally?

Mr Donald Trump, though he was the oldest person (at 70) to be elected president, doesn't seem to have a problem with age, not so much because of his full head of dyed hair, but because he is strangely ageless.

He is at once a vigorous old guy, a 28-year-old Internet troll and an 11-year-old boy off his Ritalin.

Mr Biden, though he can seem reassuringly mature at times, can also seem a little dated, like a character out of the 1950s.

A year and a half after the Access

Hollywood recording was released, during which Mr Trump was caught using what he later described as "locker-room talk", Mr Biden said he didn't want to debate Mr Trump, but that he wanted to "take him behind the gym and beat the hell out of him".

Mr Biden was assailed in some quarters for "toxic masculinity", but really, he seemed at times like a character out of an Archie and Jughead comic book.

Many older people such as me (I'm 67) feel out of step with the younger generation – probably because we are. We are insufficiently "woke", we can be uncomfortable with or just confused by the variations of gender fluidity, and we can find ourselves stifling a laugh at a politically incorrect joke.

Secretly, though, we think we are not just older, but wiser than the young people who are reported by polls to have socialist leanings.

How, we ask ourselves, can the country pay for free college tuition

and universal Medicare?

When I was younger (35 years old), I helped popularise the notion that age and experience count for a great deal in government by co-authoring, with Walter Isaacson, a book called *The Wise Men*.

During the 1960s and 1970s, in times of crisis, presidents would bring in elder advisers, dubbed the "WOM" (Wise Old Men), to give them counsel.

It was a meeting of WOMs in March 1968 that helped convince president Lyndon B. Johnson that the time had come to begin to draw down American involvement in the Vietnam War. Five days later, he announced peace talks and that he would not run for re-election. It was a moment of true statesmanship – to see old Cold Warriors such as former secretary of state Dean Acheson (age 74) and ambassador-at-large Averell Harriman (age 76) warning the president of the perils of American hubris.

So, when it comes to making tough calls in the Oval Office, is older wiser? Well, actually, maybe not. Older people can get stuck in their ways. They can be too confident in their judgment and heedless of new facts.

The Wise Old Men who advised Mr Johnson in 1968 to get out of Vietnam had earlier counselled the president to get into Vietnam.

During the mid-1960s, they had warned Mr Johnson not to listen to the anti-war protesters or go wobbly on the communists.

During the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, president John F. Kennedy brought Mr Acheson into his group of close advisers. Mr Acheson, whose hawkishness had hardened in old age, counselled the young president to take out the Soviet missiles with airstrikes.

It is a good thing Mr Kennedy didn't listen to him, or we might all be radioactive dust now.

Old men (and old women) get

worn out, mentally and physically, no matter how hard they try to stay vigorous and alert.

In his mid-70s, president Ronald Reagan may have suffered from early dementia by the end of his second term. By the end of president Dwight D. Eisenhower's second term – he was 70, at the time the oldest president ever – he was spending more time on his putting than dealing with the out-of-control mushrooming of the nuclear arsenal or the secret excesses of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Recently thought about the burdens of age – the closed-mindedness and sheer fatigue – and the importance of younger and fresher perspectives in connection with the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan in August 1945.

President Harry S. Truman's top civilian adviser was secretary of war Henry L. Stimson. In later years, Mr Stimson would be revered as a role model for a later generation of

Wise Old Men.

But at a meeting of Mr Truman's top war council in June 1945, Mr Stimson, who was 77, was exhausted. Suffering from a migraine, he had not slept well the night before. He barely spoke up.

Instead, his aide, Mr John J. McCloy, tried to argue that "we ought to have our heads examined" if the US didn't try to induce the Japanese to surrender before dropping the bomb.

Mr McCloy suggested that instead of demanding unconditional surrender, the Allies should let Japan keep its emperor, a gambit that might have worked to avert Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The instance cried out for creative thinking, but no one in the room was ready to listen to the 40-year-old, who was deemed too young and brash.

So listen to your elders. But don't necessarily vote for them.

WASHINGTON POST



Bharatiya Janata Party workers marching on the street as part of a state-wide dawn to dusk strike in Kochi, Kerala, last week during widespread demonstrations over two women entering the Sabarimala temple. The Sabarimala row has now engulfed not only Kerala, but the rest of India as well. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

## Two women enter a temple, a country erupts

The debate over whether women of childbearing age can visit a shrine in Kerala, India, has become a battle involving caste, gender, party politics and history

Supriya Nair

MUMBAI • Every year, for 41 days in November and December, millions of barefoot pilgrims dressed in black and carrying bundles of offerings on their heads trek through the deep forest along the Pampa River and up the Sabari hills in the southern state of Kerala.

At one of the summits is a shrine dedicated to the Hindu god Ayyappan, who, in his avatar as a prince, is often said to have defeated a terrifying demoness at this very spot.

The pilgrimage to the Sabarimala shrine, believed to be centuries old, has strict rules. Devotees are expected to observe 41 days of ritual austerities beforehand, trimming neither hair nor nails, and forgoing meat, alcohol and sex.

Custom had it that any observant person could be admitted to the temple – except girls and women between 10 and 50, forbidden on the grounds that their presence dishonours the celibate Ayyappan.

But in September, the Supreme Court of India declared the

exclusion of women at Sabarimala illegal, setting off an uproar that has become a months-long battle over differences of caste, gender, party politics and history.

On New Year's Day, millions of women, led by Kerala's communist government, formed a human chain that stretched over 620km from the northernmost tip of the state to the state capital, Thiruvananthapuram, in the south. Hours later, two women, aided by police officers, stepped into the Sabarimala shrine. Their entry was followed by violent protests, many carried out by young men with the backing of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which governs India.

The Sabarimala row has now engulfed not only Kerala, but the rest of the country as well.

Religious sentiment and political opportunism have kept the issue in the spotlight, where it is likely to remain as the country braces itself for a parliamentary election this year.

India's reputation as a brutally patriarchal society isn't misbegotten, but it ignores how varied the status of women is in the country. In Kerala, because of early social justice movements and relatively enlightened governance, women have enjoyed freedoms not common elsewhere in India. Over the 20th century, women in the state had freer access to healthcare and education than in many parts of India. Some communities had inheritance customs that gave women an unusual amount of control over property and private finances.

But Kerala's Hindus could also be more rigid and hierarchical than their counterparts elsewhere. The 19th-century reformer Swami

Vivekananda called the state a "lunatic asylum" for its humiliating range of caste discriminations.

Sabarimala devotees often pride themselves on having escaped these fetters. The shrine is nominally open to people of all religions. It is not known to have practised caste exclusion, and its priests have said they will admit transgender people without a menstrual cycle.

While other Ayyappan temples in India admit women of all ages, the faithful say that the exclusion of notionally fertile women is essential to the practices of this one shrine. Some female supporters of the ban even began a campaign called #ReadyToWait – that is, for menopause.

There are those who see in the decision to allow women into the shrine simply the determination to destroy an old custom. Before the Supreme Court judgment, after all, there had been no mass movement, no sustained outcry over the exclusion. But for others, the fight over the fate of the shrine is also a fight over which strain of Kerala's history – its deep orthodoxy or its fierce progressivism – will shape its future.

Kerala's Communist Party of India (Marxist) government, which supports women's entry into the temple, has long argued that the ban on women is a powerful symbol of injustice. The fight for gender equality, Kerala's Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has said, is a part of class struggle.

The Sabarimala conflict is also closely bound with India's reckoning with caste. When India freed itself from the British Empire, nowhere did the clash of old and new sound more fiercely than in Hindu temples. My own dominant-caste grandparents, who grew up in Kerala, were devotees of temples where "untouchables" were not permitted to pray until 1947, when laws on temple entry began to change in parts of newly independent India. The Supreme Court passed the Sabarimala judgment in accordance with this egalitarian spirit.

And so, even if the fight over Sabarimala is about gender justice, it's not coincidence that the battle lines have pitted dominant-caste Keralites, defending the exclusion, against what they see as rival interests. For the Women's Wall demonstration on New Year's Day,

the communists were joined by a rainbow coalition of social organisations representing Muslim women, Catholic nuns, marginal-caste associations, atheists, rationalists and many others. Dominant-caste associations, such as the powerful Nair Service Society, were conspicuously absent.

Other parties, like the Indian National Congress and the BJP, which initially welcomed the Supreme Court's judgment, have reversed their positions to support the orthodoxy, sensing political opportunity – even as the BJP has quietly enabled gender-neutral temple entry in states where it has power. Meanwhile, in dominant-caste homes and temples, and on social media, some Keralites have done their best impression of a community under siege. The women who entered the Sabarimala shrine were widely suspected of being political plants.

Last week, the temple priests closed the shrine to "purify" it of the women's presence, a reminder of the monstrous notion of ritual pollution used to oppress marginal castes for generations – only this time, it was seen as acceptable, even necessary.

The orthodoxy may yet prevail: The Supreme Court is scheduled this month to consider petitions requesting it to review its decision, and despite its show of strength, the communist party is widely expected to have a battle on its hands in the coming election.

As for the women who entered the temple on New Year's Day, they were smuggled in and out of the shrine like thieves in the night. But on the same day, Indians saw the face of a woman videographer, Ms Shajila Ali Fathima, doggedly filming street rioting on that day with tears pouring down her face as protesters heckled and insulted her. A photograph of her, trending on news networks, seemed to embody both the spirit of the Women's Wall and the agony of feminist struggle.

Congress politician Shashi Tharoor, criticising the Supreme Court judgment some months ago, said it pitted India's democracy against its constitutional morality. The Women's Wall, where millions raised their hands in the name of equality was, if anything, a counterargument. That each is a guarantee of the other. NYTIMES

## Ghosn's exit from Nissan was ugly but overdue

Anjani Trivedi

Where did Nissan Motor end and the world of Carlos Ghosn begin? It's unclear after his decades-long reign.

"I have dedicated two decades of my life to reviving Nissan and building the Alliance," Ghosn told a Tokyo court on Tuesday in his first appearance since his arrest, according to a prepared statement.

He had worked "day and night, on the earth and in the air", the former Nissan chairman said.

In closing, Ghosn said he was innocent of the accusations made against him.

His innocence or guilt is for the court to decide. Still, his fate raises the question of whether his corporate tenure should have drawn to a close even earlier.

A multi-part series on What Drives Carlos Ghosn on the company's website and nikkei.com – which includes his baby pictures – talks about how the executive split his time between four countries.

"This kind of lifestyle can take a toll on anyone – both physically and socially. But it's what's required of many leaders in the age of globalisation," it says.

Such personal sharing by the chief executive officer on a corporate website is rare.

The annals of CEO history are filled with stories of legendary men whose misuse of company assets precipitated their downfall.

Often, the blurred line between their business and private lives lies at the heart of it.

Ghosn became so personally entwined with Nissan that he ended up overshadowing the company, even after moving into the chairman role and appointing his personal choice of Mr Hiroto Saikawa as CEO.

The longer a top executive spends at the company, it seems, the fuzzier those lines become.

Consider Ghosn's explanation about why Nissan covered his collateral on personal foreign-exchange forward contracts during the financial crisis.

When the executive realised he didn't have the resources to put up the amount himself, according to his statement, he was faced with a choice: Either resign and use his retirement allowance, or ask Nissan to take on the burden "so long as it came to no cost to the company" as he gathered cash from other sources to pay the company back.

He chose the latter. His "moral commitment to Nissan" didn't allow him to walk away because "a captain doesn't jump ship in the middle of a storm", the statement says.

Whether or not Nissan incurred losses is beside the point (Ghosn said it didn't). That Nissan was



Former chairman Carlos Ghosn became so personally entwined with the company that he ended up overshadowing it.

even a stopgap option for its top executive's personal trading losses presents an already-flawed picture.

Other allegations include Nissan paying "huge sums" towards Ghosn's residences in four cities around the world that weren't justified by the business, according to Japanese broadcaster NHK. It also reported that Ghosn charged travel expenses for family vacations, amounting to tens of millions of yen, to a Nissan unit. These weren't addressed in the statement.

Long tenures hurt companies too. A retrospective look at the likes of General Electric's Mr Jack Welch shows as much.

A study found that the longer CEOs are at the helm, the more reliant they become on their internal networks for information and the less attuned they are to market conditions.

In Ghosn's case, perhaps blindsided by the status quo, he ignored Nissan's dismal performance in recent years in its largest markets.

He also seemed to have ignored the growing discontent around him.

Planned corporate successions are also rarer than you'd imagine. The rate of CEO turnover at the world's largest companies because of ethical lapses rose almost 40 per cent from 2007 to 2011 and from 2012 to 2016.

Meanwhile, the median CEO tenure at large-cap firms in the US is around five years, down from six in 2013.

Research has found that replacing CEOs is good for companies.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers study from 2016 found that Japan and Western Europe had one of the highest CEO turnover rates – 15.5 per cent and 15.3 per cent.

Most CEO changes in Japan are planned.

The power Ghosn wielded was impressive and, to be fair, so was his commitment.

Yet, the company had one of the worst corporate governance records in Japan during his oversight.

Critics say this is a reality of Japan Inc. If Carlos Ghosn was such a hard-hitting, internationally renowned executive who did things differently, shouldn't he have been able to change that?

It's unfortunate Ghosn departed this way. Perhaps shareholders can extract a lesson on the dangers of letting a legendary leader stay too long. BLOOMBERG



## BIG PICTURE



WEATHER

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PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## In search of a healing touch

Thousands of Catholics waited for hours for a chance to touch a statue of a black Jesus Christ, borne on a carriage pulled by ropes, during an annual procession in Manila yesterday.

The life-size statue, called Black Nazarene, is believed to have miraculous healing powers. Devotees threw towels to people on the carriage to wipe on the

statue, while others jostled to touch the thick ropes used to pull the carriage, believing the slightest touch would heal their illnesses, reported Reuters.

The authorities estimated that the procession would draw about five million devotees.

The statue was brought to the Philippines by a group of missionaries from Mexico in 1606.



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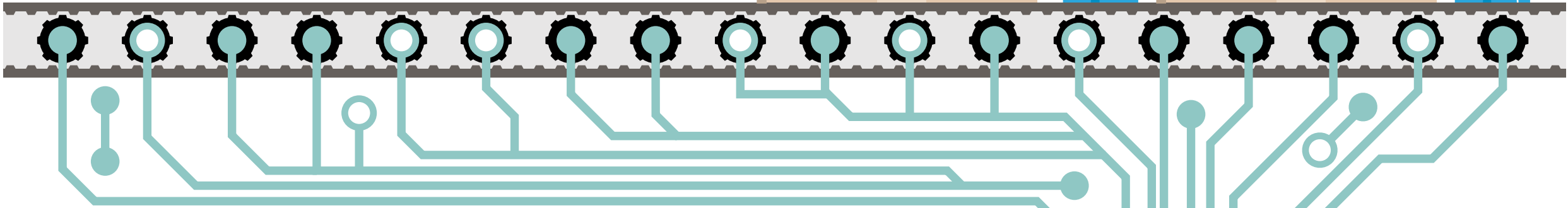
C3

# SMEs can take up digital solutions free for six months



Eligible businesses are those that have at least 30 per cent local shareholding, and revenue of not more than \$100 million or fewer than 200 employees, at group level.

Businesses can choose any two of five categories: accounting, human resource management system and payroll, digital marketing, digital transactions, and cyber security.



## Start Digital initiative aims to facilitate firms' digitalisation, in drive to transform economy

Hariz Baharudin

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can now get help in going digital in areas such as accounting and human resource management, with costs partially paid for by the Government.

Under the Start Digital initiative, these businesses can take up two basic digital solutions that run for at least 18 months, with costs waived for six months.

They can choose any two of five categories: accounting, human resource management system and payroll, digital marketing, digital transactions, and cyber security.

"SMEs make up the vast majority of businesses in Singapore. The extent and speed of their digitalisation will have a profound effect to transform our economy," said Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran at the launch of the initiative yesterday at Carlton Hotel.

He added: "It (The initiative) especially targets the needs of our new SMEs, by offering affordable, modular, easy-to-use basic digital solutions and packages of good quality."

Businesses are eligible for Start Digital if they have at least 30 per cent local shareholding and revenue of not more than \$100 million or fewer than 200 employees, at group level. The initiative is developed by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) and Enterprise Singapore (ESG).

SMEs can approach any of the scheme's partners – DBS Bank, Maybank, OCBC Bank, Singtel, StarHub and United Overseas Bank – to apply. After the six months of waived fees, the SMEs will have to pay according to the rates given by these partner companies.

At the event, Mr Iswaran also officially launched two initiatives that the Government has already implemented – the Data Protection (DP) Trustmark Certification and the Nationwide E-Invoicing Network. Piloted last year, the DP Trustmark allows companies to apply to IMDA to have their data protection systems independently assessed and certified.

Since the pilot phase's conclusion at the end of last September, 40 organisations have signed up and six of them have received the DP Trustmark certification, with the rest expected to get theirs in the coming months, said IMDA.

Certification to get the DP mark involves an application fee of \$500 to IMDA, as well as fees for the assessment body that can range between \$1,400 and \$10,000.

Mr Iswaran said IMDA will waive the application fee for the first year for SMEs, while ESG will provide funding support for Singapore companies to get certified. IMDA will be partnering the National Council of Social Service to fund member voluntary welfare organisations in their adoption of the certification.

The Nationwide E-Invoicing Network, first announced in last year's Budget, is based on the Pan-European Public Procurement On-Line – a widely used European standard.

E-invoicing is the automated creation, exchange and processing of requests for payments between suppliers and buyers using a standardised digital format.

It can help speed up transactions while minimising disputes, errors and operating costs, as it does away with existing digitised invoices, such as computer printouts, PDF documents or scanned invoices.

Said Mr Iswaran: "The improved verification and validation of e-invoicing will also foster greater confidence in transactions, building trust between suppliers and customers."

It also enables local businesses to plug into the international marketplace, he added.

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# ‘Hunt in packs’ so SMEs can benefit from FTAs: Panel

It suggests giving larger firms incentives to help smaller ones enter new markets

Seow Bei Yi

While Singapore has signed several free trade agreements (FTAs) over the years, one group of businesses seems to be having difficulties reaping their benefits – small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

To help them, companies could “hunt in a pack”, with larger businesses such as multinationals given incentives to work with smaller firms from non-competing sectors, leading the way to enter

new markets, industry leaders said at a roundtable discussion yesterday, ahead of Singapore’s Budget on Feb 18.

“A lot of the FTAs and high-level government-to-government contracts that get signed seldom filter down to the SME level, and they normally stay at maybe the government-linked company level,” said Mr Ang Yuit, vice-president of membership and training at the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises.

“More can be done by having some of the larger enterprises take

leadership in doing the hunting as a pack.”

Mr Ang was one of 15 panellists who spoke at an Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants (ISCA) event on the Republic’s future economic progress.

Besides suggesting ways to support SMEs, industry leaders shared concerns about the fallout from trade tensions, discussed the need for companies to go global and spoke on the challenges in understanding Industry Transformation Maps (ITMs), which set out directions for sectors and help them prepare for the future.

Their discussion was co-chaired by Mr Liang Eng Hwa, MP and chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Finance and

Trade and Industry, and Mr Kon Yin Tong, president of ISCA.

Mr Liang said his committee will meet government officials later this month, and will give them businesses’ feedback.

But he noted the need for industry stakeholders to take ownership of transformation efforts for better outcomes.

He highlighted the role that trade associations and chambers play in bringing companies, especially SMEs, on board with ITMs, but association leaders said the groups and their members face constraints.

In particular, challenges faced by smaller companies were a recurring topic at yesterday’s event at the InterContinental Singapore hotel.

Dr Ahmad Magad, secretary-gen-

eral of the Singapore Manufacturing Federation, said ITMs need to be clearer and more detailed for SMEs to understand them better.

Asked by Mr Kon why smaller firms are not already “hunting in packs”, he said that, apart from being guarded about their activities, SMEs may be unable to spare manpower for collaborations.

To encourage these tie-ups, Professor Sum Yee Loong, board member of the Singapore Institute of Accredited Tax Professionals, suggested giving big companies larger tax deductions if they develop business with smaller firms.

Mr Tay Hong Beng, head of tax at KPMG Singapore, suggested companies could focus on working with “complementary partners” to innovate, rather than be asked to work with their competitors.

Industry leaders also mooted ways to help smaller enterprises thrive.

To boost entrepreneurship, the authorities can consider allowing companies to carry back tax losses for more than a year, said Mr Low Hwee Chua, regional manager at Deloitte Singapore.

With SMEs having fewer resources to train workers, cash pay-

outs or tax deductions to defray such costs can be helpful too, he added.

Grants for training workers should apply to more online courses too, said Mr Ang.

Companies also face a labour crunch, with Mr Chia Hock Lai, president of the Singapore Fintech Association, flagging the shortage of talent in areas such as artificial intelligence and blockchain.

Mr R. Dhinakaran, president of the Singapore Retailers Association, suggested seasonal quotas for foreign workers in some sectors, when demand is high.

OCBC Bank’s head of treasury research and strategy, Ms Selena Ling, said there is “room for a more fiscally generous Budget”, noting that this year’s Budget will also see the continuation of existing schemes, such as the ITMs.

“The external environment remains fairly murky,” she said, alluding to the United States-China trade war and noting there will be geopolitical uncertainties. “It’s a question of how lasting the impact will be. So far, they don’t seem to have caused permanent damage.”

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(From left) Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education Chee Hong Tat and ITE College East principal Yek Tiew Ming, with students Akid Ali Liaqaat Ali, Javiel Chng, Shaon Suppiah and Theodore Chong, at ITE Headquarters yesterday. ITE will roll out an enhanced financial literacy curriculum from March in partnership with DBS. ST PHOTO: JOSEPH CHUA

## ITE, DBS tie up to boost students’ financial literacy

Sue-Ann Tan

A study by DBS Bank has found that Institute of Technical Education (ITE) students were better than their peers at saving their pocket money.

But they were not keeping the cash for a rainy day, opting instead to set it aside for something they had been planning to buy.

To teach first-year ITE students the basics of budgeting and understanding their finances, ITE will roll out an enhanced financial literacy curriculum from March in partnership with DBS.

Ms Low Khah Gek, ITE’s chief executive, said the new curriculum will leverage the bank’s strong data analytics capabilities.

“Through this, we will be able to draw insights into the spending and saving habits of the youth-adult population, including ITE students.

“The power of such analytics is that we now have new and authentic ways to engage with our students to help them understand their spending patterns and habits,” she added.

The tie-up was announced yesterday at the ITE Headquarters and officiated by Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and

Education Chee Hong Tat.

The new curriculum will expose students to digital tools.

For example, a tool in the DBS/POSB mobile banking application called Your Financial GPS allows users to track their spending, set and track budgets, and use personalised insights and financial advice to manage their finances. Launched last May, this tool has more than 1.5 million active users.

Students will have hands-on experience in creating their own financial plan using the tools. They will also have lessons that include practical examples and real life-scenarios.

The curriculum will be rolled out

to this year’s batch of 10,000 first-year students.

In his speech, Mr Chee said: “There is a need for us to work together to plug the knowledge gap through schools and tertiary institutions, and also through continuing education and training under SkillsFuture.

“We need to find ways to present complex financial concepts in an easy-to-understand manner, so that more Singaporeans know how to apply these principles to improve their personal and family finances.”

Mr Jeremy Soo, DBS’ head of Consumer Banking Group (Singapore), said there is a need for people to de-

velop a “healthy relationship with money” and be responsible for their finances.

“Such habits will allow them to take charge of their financial health, plan well for the future, and reap the benefits as they progress later in life,” he added.

ITE student Theodore Chong, 17, is hoping that digital tools will help him become a better saver.

“I keep my receipts and track them manually, but sometimes I forget. It’s easier to have them in my phone that I carry everywhere,” he said.

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## Meeting arranged for oBike creditors on Jan 23

A meeting has been arranged on Jan 23 for liquidators of defunct bicycle-rental firm oBike to keep creditors updated on the status of the winding-up.

According to a press statement issued yesterday by the liquidators, FTI Consulting, no payments or distributions will be made at the meeting later this month at the Shine Auditorium at Shaw Tower in Beach Road at 2.30pm.

Creditors can find out more about the meeting at [www.obikedepositholders.com](http://www.obikedepositholders.com), including the necessary forms for them to submit their claims or proxy nomination by noon on Jan 22 in order to attend or vote at the meeting.

oBike, which folded unexpectedly last June, was reported in August to owe users about \$9 million in unrefunded deposits.

In its circular, FTI said that since its appointment in August, it had concluded the retrieval and scrapping of most of oBike’s bicycles in Singapore and recovered oBike funds held with two separate third-party vendors.

It had also conducted further investigation into oBike’s affairs and the remittance of funds to the company’s Hong Kong outfit, oBike Hong Kong.

FTI said that absence from the non-mandatory meeting does not compromise creditors’ rights, and they will be able to submit their claims through the online form or at the liquidators’ office even after the meeting.

Individual users of oBike rental services who are claiming their deposits and would be personally attending the meeting are not required to submit a proxy form.

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## Olam to shut sugar trading desk

NEWYORK • Singapore-based agricultural commodities trading firm Olam International will shut its sugar trade desk, spokesman Nikki Barber said on Tuesday, another sign of pressure on trading houses.

The decision comes after raw and white sugar futures on ICE ended last year at their lowest levels since 2008, as a global supply glut led to a second straight annual fall.

On Tuesday, March white sugar was up 60 US cents to US\$345.40 per tonne, compared with US\$390.90 a tonne a year ago.

“It’s not really a shocking statement, only because we know the margins are terrible in sugar,” one US trader said.

Olam, which owns two sugar mills in India and crushes over a million tonnes of sugar cane, is the latest sugar trading house to have scaled back or sold businesses.

In late November, Biosev, the sugar and ethanol maker controlled by trading firm Louis Dreyfus, hired an investment bank to seek potential buyers for some or all of its plants in Brazil.

Biosev had retained a unit of Dutch bank Rabobank to explore opportunities for its nine production units in Brazil’s centre-south region, the country’s main sugar producing zone, a source told Reuters then. Weeks earlier, the firm sold the two mills it owned in Brazil’s north-east, a less important sugar producing region, for a combined 273.6 million reais (\$100 million).

Singapore-based Wilmar International scooped up the sugar trading book of rival Bunge for an undisclosed amount in August.

The closing of Olam’s sugar trading desk was earlier reported by Bloomberg. REUTERS



# Leonie Gardens seeks to go en bloc again at \$800m

Same reserve price as previous attempt, whose tender closed last June with no bids

**Grace Leong**  
Business Correspondent

Leonie Gardens joins a growing list of die-hard sellers trying their luck to go en bloc in the new year.

The prime District 9 condominium in Leonie Hill, whose collective sales agreement expires in May, relaunched its tender for a second time at the same reserve price of \$800 million last month. The tender closes on Jan 22 at 3pm.

The 138-unit condo first launched for sale in May last year, and that tender closed without a bid on June 21.

“We held off relaunching until December because of a lack of interest after the July 6 cooling measures. But since then, developers have had time to see how the new launches fared and how prices are holding up,” said Mr Vijay Chopra, chairman of the Leonie Gardens collective sale committee.

Asked why the condo was relaunched at the same price, he said: “The owners are willing to accept a lower price but we don’t know what that price should be. We don’t



Leonie Gardens has 70-plus years remaining on its 99-year lease. At the guide price of \$800 million, each owner stands to get between \$4.3 million and \$10.2 million. ST FILE PHOTO

want to go through the process of lowering the reserve price without knowing first what the developers are willing to offer.”

At the guide price of \$800 million, each owner stands to get between \$4.3 million and \$10.2 million.

The reserve price translates to \$2,104 per square foot based on existing gross floor area, or \$2,021 per sq ft per plot ratio if a 10 per cent balcony space is included, subject to approval.

Leonie Gardens has 70-plus years remaining on its 99-year lease, according to marketing agent Huttons Asia. The project sits on a total strata area of 324,972.90 sq ft and has a gross floor area of 410,431.80 sq ft.

As the site is located within the Central Area, it is not subject to an average unit size of 85 sq m, which will allow the developer to build smaller units and keep the quan-

tum palatable for potential buyers. Huttons says it can be developed into 544 condominium units of about 70 sq m each, or 380 condominium units of about 100 sq m each.

The site is zoned residential, with a plot ratio of 2.8. Subject to approval, it is possible to have a 10 per cent balcony space added, increasing the area to 449,031.63 sq ft.

No development charge is payable as its existing baseline is above the current plot ratio of 2.8. But a development charge of about \$44 million will be levied if the additional 10 per cent balcony space is utilised.

Other developments in the same district that have been put up for collective sale include the 211-unit, 99-year leasehold Horizon Towers in Leonie Hill Road, which relaunched its collective sale tender at a \$1.1 billion reserve price, un-

changed from its attempt last July.

That round closed in September without any bids. Its new tender closes on Jan 28 at 3pm.

Other sites in District 9 that were put up for collective sale last year, and for which there were no takers, include The Regalia in River Valley and Elizabeth Tower in Mount Elizabeth.

“Even if we don’t get bids this time round, we still have time to do a private treaty,” said Mr Vijay, who owns more than one unit at Leonie Gardens, including a penthouse.

“We are located at the highest point in the Orchard area, and near the upcoming Great World MRT and Orchard Boulevard MRT (stations). We are ideal for any developer who wants exposure to the prime district,” he added.

gleong@sph.com.sg

ENOUGH TIME FOR PRIVATE TREATY

Even if we don't get bids this time round, we still have time to do a private treaty.



MR VIJAY CHOPRA, chairman of the Leonie Gardens collective sale committee.

## Forum to discuss ways to invest in, engage employees

With the manpower shortage a common refrain among businesses, being able to navigate human capital challenges successfully will be a key competitive advantage to get ahead.

A new forum organised by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices aims to help companies make sense of this perennial issue and enable them to tap their greatest asset – their people.

To be held on Jan 21, the Human

Capital Partnership – Singapore Press Holdings (HCP-SPH) forum’s theme is “Employee engagement in today’s landscape: Strategies to attract and retain talent”.

Held by Minister of State for Manpower and National Development Zaqu Mohamad, the panel discussion will include views from a range of leaders across industry and representatives of HCP firms.

The HCP Programme is a tripartite initiative that brings together employers who are committed to

progressive employment practices and developing their human capital.

Panelists include Ms Audrey Cheong, managing director, Federal Express Singapore; Ms Rebecca Chew, deputy managing partner, Rajah & Tann; Mr Chia Yoong Hui, CEO, Ascenz Solutions; and Mr Sean Tan, principal and consulting services leader, Mercer Singapore.

They will give their take on the importance of employee engagement, why human capital is worth investing in, and its relevance to employee

engagement and talent retention. They will also discuss the latest employee engagement issues and ways to foster a more engaged workforce and an inclusive workplace.

The forum will be moderated by Straits Times senior executive sub-editor Toh Yong Chuan.

The event is also an ideal opportunity for participants to network with other progressive employers who walk the talk.

Mr Chia from Ascenz Solutions said: “As an SME (small and

medium-sized enterprise) that started off with only two people a decade ago, we believe our employees are the key assets of our organisation, and it’s our employees who run the business at the end of the day.

“If our people who propel the business are not engaged or... motivated, then we would have failed.”

He added that grooming employees to be future leaders who would drive the business is part and parcel of fulfilling its duty as an employer.

Ms Chew from Rajah & Tann con-

curred that the key to its success is the value it places on its people.

“To continually keep our staff and lawyers engaged in the long run, we need to appreciate that their personal well-being will create a positive impact on their work life,” she said. “We are committed to explore and invest in effective work-life strategies and firmly believe that this would bring long-term benefits to both our firm and the employees.”

The forum will be held at the SPH News Centre Auditorium.

## Private investor buys Ascott Raffles Place for \$353m

Private investor Cheong Sim Lam, whose family developed International Plaza and the Hyatt Regency Singapore, has acquired Ascott Reit’s Ascott Raffles Place Singapore for \$353.3 million.

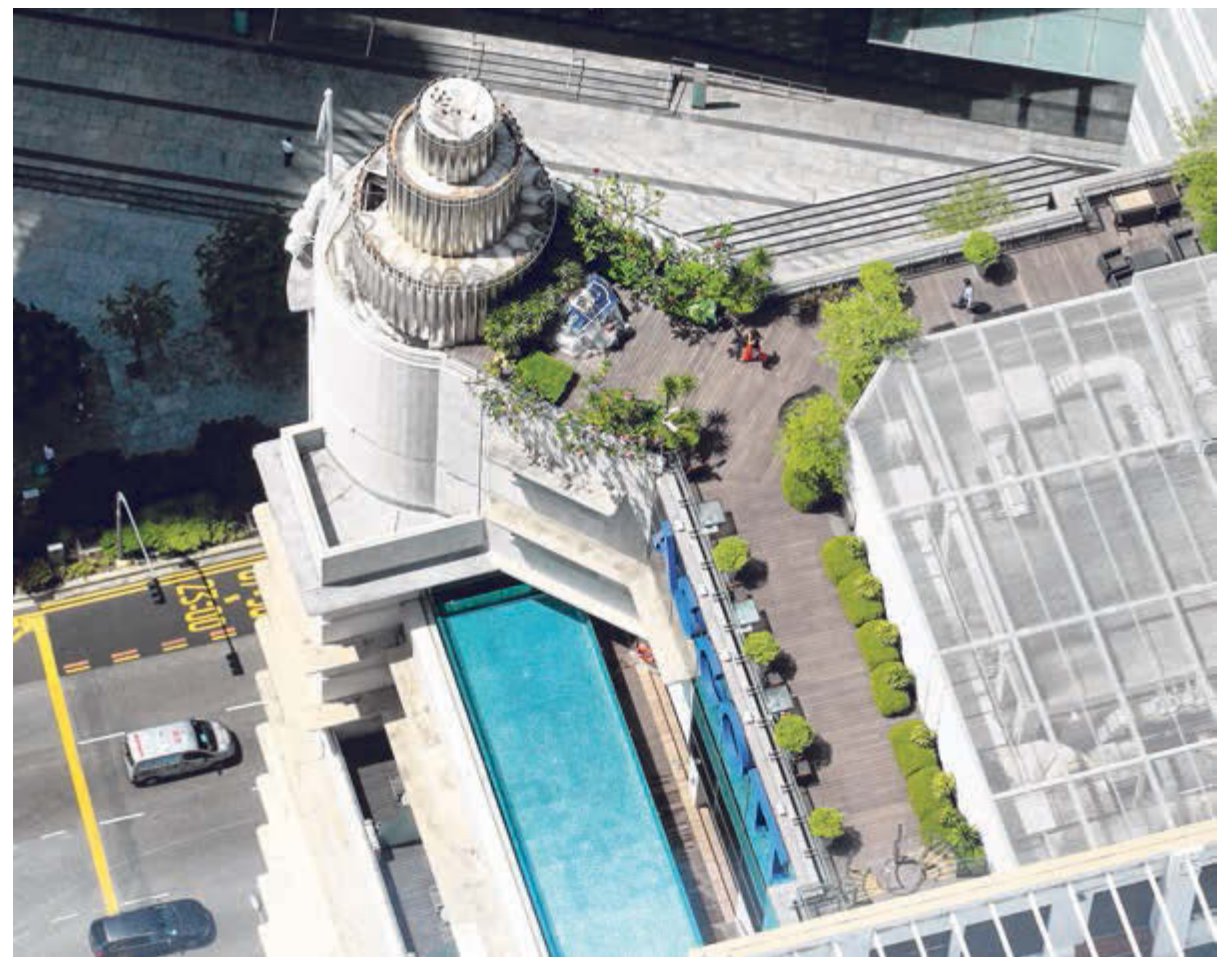
The 20-storey conserved building with 146 serviced apartments is located at 2 Finlayson Green, and has a 999-year lease.

Mr Cheong developed several residential projects such as Robinson Suites in Robinson Road, and previously owned 137 and 139 Cecil Street.

The sale price is 64.3 per cent above the property’s latest valuation of \$215 million as of Dec 31 last year. After accounting for transaction-related expenses, Ascott Reit is expected to realise an estimated net gain of \$134 million.

The net sale proceeds may be used to pare down the debts of Ascott Reit, fund potential acquisitions and/or for other general corporate purposes, the company said in a Singapore Exchange announcement yesterday after market close.

Ascott Raffles Place accounted for 3 per cent of Ascott Reit’s gross profit for the nine months ended Sept 30 last year. Its sale is not expected to have a material impact on



Ascott Raffles Place, a 20-storey conserved building with 146 serviced apartments, is at 2 Finlayson Green. It accounted for 3 per cent of Ascott Reit’s gross profit for the nine months ended Sept 30 last year. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTO

Ascott Reit’s financial performance.

Ms Beh Siew Kim, chief executive officer of Ascott Reit’s manager, said in a statement: “The sale will give us the financial flexibility to recycle capital and invest in higher-yielding properties. We may also use the sale proceeds to pay down debt, which will then increase our debt headroom for potential acquisitions of quality assets, or to de-

velop our own properties such as lyf one-north Singapore to enhance Ascott Reit’s portfolio.”

The sale was brokered by Cushman & Wakefield. Ascott Reit said the transaction is expected to be completed in May.

Ascott Reit’s other operational properties in Singapore are Ascott Orchard, Citadines Mount Sophia and Somerset Liang Court. lyf one-

north is expected to open in 2021.

Ascott Reit’s asset size has grown to \$5.3 billion, and its international portfolio comprises 73 properties with 11,430 units in 37 cities across 14 countries in the Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe as of Sept 30 last year.

Its serviced residences are mostly operated under the Ascott, Citadines and Somerset brands.

## Condo rents down 0.2%, while HDB rents up 0.6% in December

Rents for Singapore condominiums and private apartments reversed course to notch a small decrease last month, while HDB rents rose after dipping in November, according to a report yesterday.

Flash estimates from real estate portal SRX Property show rents for non-landed private residential properties fell by 0.2 per cent month on month.

Year on year, rents last month were 0.1 per cent higher than in December 2017. They are still 19.8 per cent off their peak in January 2013.

OrangeTee & Tie research and consultancy head Christine Sun noted that monthly rents for non-landed private properties have been fluctuating within a narrow growth band of between -1 per cent and 1 per cent for the past 12 months, indicating that rents have largely stabilised over the past year. “However, rental volume has been on a general downtrend since August amid fewer expatriate hiring due to the continued tightening of foreign worker policy and cuts in housing budgets.”

That said, she added that the market may see some respite as the number of private homes being completed this year may be reduced. A substantial number of private homes from collective sales are also being withdrawn and demolished to make way for new units.

In the smaller HDB rental mar-

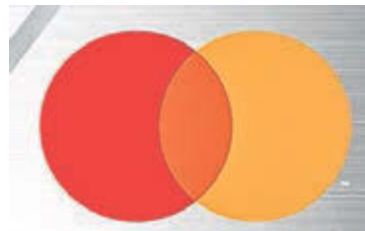
ket, rents rose by 0.6 per cent last month, after dipping 0.5 per cent in November. The HDB three-room, four-room and executive flats all recorded rental increases of 0.5 per cent, 0.2 per cent, and 4 per cent respectively, while rents for HDB five-room flats fell 0.2 per cent.

Nonetheless, Ms Sun noted that the rise in HDB rentals could be a blip as rental volume in December is low. She added that HDB rents may experience increased downward pressure in the coming months with more flats reaching the five-year minimum occupancy period to be eligible for renting out the whole unit. As such, she expects more flats being put up for rental in areas such as Punggol, Sengkang and Yishun this year.

Year on year, HDB rents last month were down 0.4 per cent from December 2017, and 15.4 per cent off their high in August 2013.

According to SRX Property, an estimated 3,450 private non-landed units were rented last month, a 9.4 per cent plunge from 3,810 units in November. Year on year, rental volume last month was 8.5 per cent lower than the 3,771 units leased in December 2017.

Separately, the number of HDB flats rented fell 8.9 per cent to 1,601 from 1,757 in November. Year on year, rental volume last month was down 4.2 per cent from 1,671 units in December 2017.



Mastercard’s new logo has just two intersecting circles of red and yellow, with orange in the middle.

## Mastercard drops its name from logo

NEW YORK • Like Apple’s apple or Nike’s swoosh, Mastercard has turned to a wordless logo.

The global credit card company announced on Monday that it was dropping the word Mastercard from its logo – where it has been for the last 50 years – leaving behind just two intersecting circles of red and yellow, with orange in the middle.

Media reports said the move comes as more and more payments are going digital – when the word “card” might appear old-fashioned.

Against this changing landscape, Mastercard wants to be seen as a financial-tech firm instead of only a credit-card network.

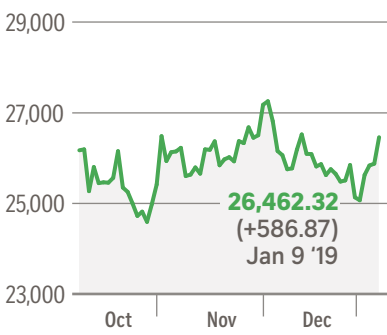
In a media statement announcing the logo change, Mastercard called itself a “digital payment company”.

“As the consumer and commerce landscape continues to evolve, the Mastercard symbol represents Mastercard better than one word ever could, and the flexible modern design will allow it to work seamlessly across the digital landscape,” Mastercard tweeted.

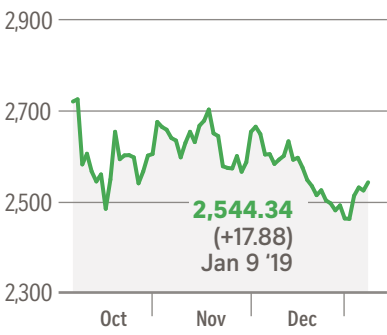
But hardly had the tweet gone out when some on the Internet started mocking the move, with one unimpressed netizen saying: “Now it’s just a simple Venn diagram.” Another said it “looks like a butt”.



Hang Seng



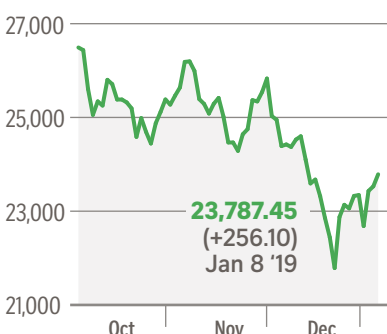
Shanghai Comp



Nikkei 225



Dow Jones



BullsAndBears

# STI extends rally to 4th day on trade talk hopes

## Tech, electronics, industrial and consumer stocks having strong rally

Lynette Tan

Singapore stocks extended gains to a fourth straight session yesterday as US-China trade talks concluded after three days.

Markets also gained across Asia, reflecting investors' hopes for positive results from the talks.

The Straits Times Index (STI) climbed 35.13 points, or 1.12 per cent, to 3,158.07.

Advancers outpaced decliners 250 to 144 as 1.6 billion shares worth \$1.12 billion changed hands.

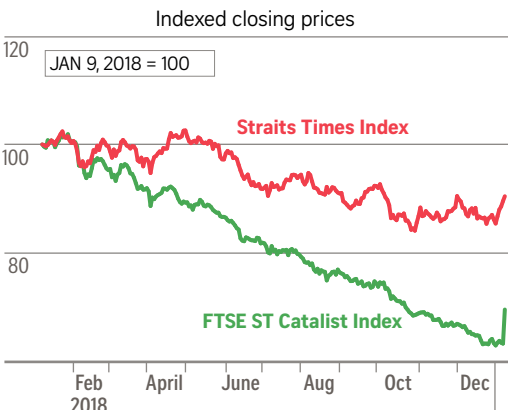
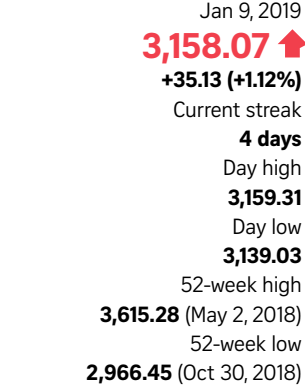
Said FXTM research analyst Lukman Otunuga: "A sense of optimism over trade talks between the United States and China ending on a positive note is clearly supporting global risk sentiment, and this continues to be reflected in global equities."

US President Donald Trump's address on the border wall and government shutdown also kept largely to script, and appeared to be shrugged off by Asian investors choosing to remain focused on ongoing trade developments, he added.

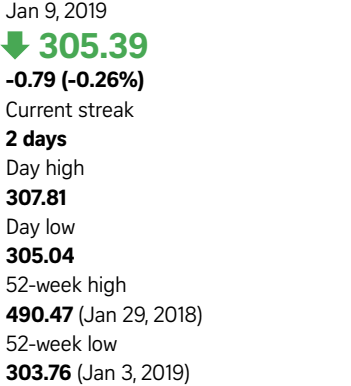
CMC Markets analyst Margaret Yang thinks the index is "attempting to reach higher highs". She expects the next resistance level to be around 3,200.

Cyclical sectors, such as technology, electronics, industrial and consumer, are having a strong

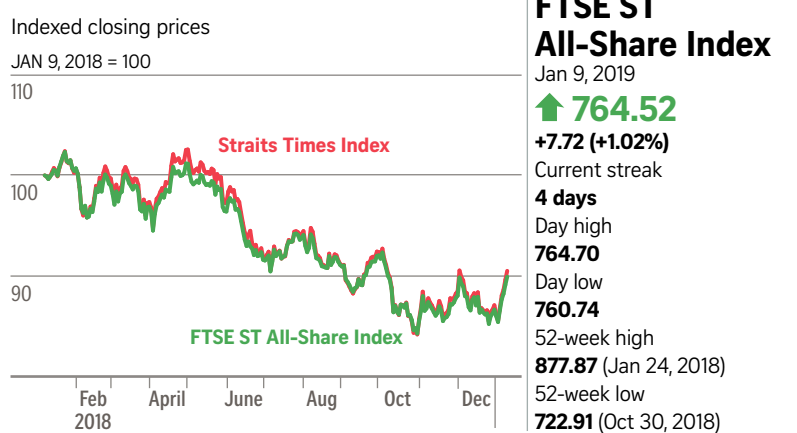
Straits Times Index



FTSE ST Catalyst Index



FTSE ST All-Share Index



rally, she added.

The index's top gainers yesterday included Venture Corp, which went up 4.56 per cent to \$14.92.

Jardine Matheson Holdings gained 1.9 per cent to US\$69.17, while Jardine Cycle & Carriage rose 2.6 per cent after lunchtime before

closing 0.5 per cent higher at \$36.27.

Among consumer stocks, Sheng Siong put on 0.91 per cent to \$1.11, while Delfi gained 0.73 per cent to \$1.38.

RHB Research Institute analyst Juliana Cai believes the sector will out-

perform the STI, given its "more defensive nature".

In a Jan 4 report, she cited Sheng Siong and "under-researched" Delfi and Genting Singapore as top picks for this year.

The offshore and marine and banking sectors may also see better sentiment as oil prices regain strength, said Ms Yang.

Keppel Corp rose 0.32 per cent to \$6.18, while Sembcorp Marine closed unchanged at \$1.62.

KrisEnergy's shares advanced 2.5 per cent to 8.2 cents.

But the banking sector may be one to watch, after news emerged of trouble at Coastal Oil Singapore, a crude oil products supplier that has filed for liquidation, hitting at least 10 banks.

These include all three Singapore banks, which are owed about half of the total debt of US\$354 million (S\$480 million).

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Straits Times Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
286	245	Ascendas Reit	265	unch	13966	6	1.3
200	161	CapitaCom Trust	180	+2	15008	4.8	0.7
388	298	Capitaland	319	+1	7563	3.8	0.7
238	195	CapitaMall Trust	237	+5	20715	4.7	1.2
1360	780	CityDev	856	+7	1559	2.1	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	217	unch	5609	4.8	1.8
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2424	+33	4113	5.9	1.4
968	767	DairyFarm USD	US931	+9	633	2.3	-
141	85.5	Genting Sing	103	+2	41598	3.4	1.6
39	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	25	unch	6433	3.2	0.6
42	23	HPH Trust USD	US25.5	+0.5	3256	10.3	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US675	+5	2940	3	0.3
6974	5580	JMH USD	US6917	+129	362	2.3	0.7
4149	3155	JSH USD	US3783	+24	227	0.8	0.4
4126	2766	Jardine C&C	3627	+18	729	3.2	1.4
892	567	Keppel Corp	618	+2	3661	3.6	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1161	+11	6061	3.2	1.2
585	455	SATS	490	+2	1747	3.7	3.4
850	672	SGX	733	+6	2053	4.1	8.3
1184	914	SIA	951	+12	2850	4.2	0.8
292	231	SPH	245	-4	5096	5.3	1.1
370	319	ST Engineering	356	+1	3098	4.2	5.2
169	123	Sembcorp Ind	162	+1	2152	1.9	0.7
365	283	Singtel	297	+3	19772	6.9	1.7
94.5	57.5	ThaiBev	65cd	+2	60628	1	3.2
3037	2380	UOB	2555	+38	2467	3.9	1.2
938	591	Venture Corp	1492	+65	1952	4	1.9
2965	1320	Wilmar Intl	319	+3	5264	3.1	0.9
166	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	129	+2	18995	3.5	0.9

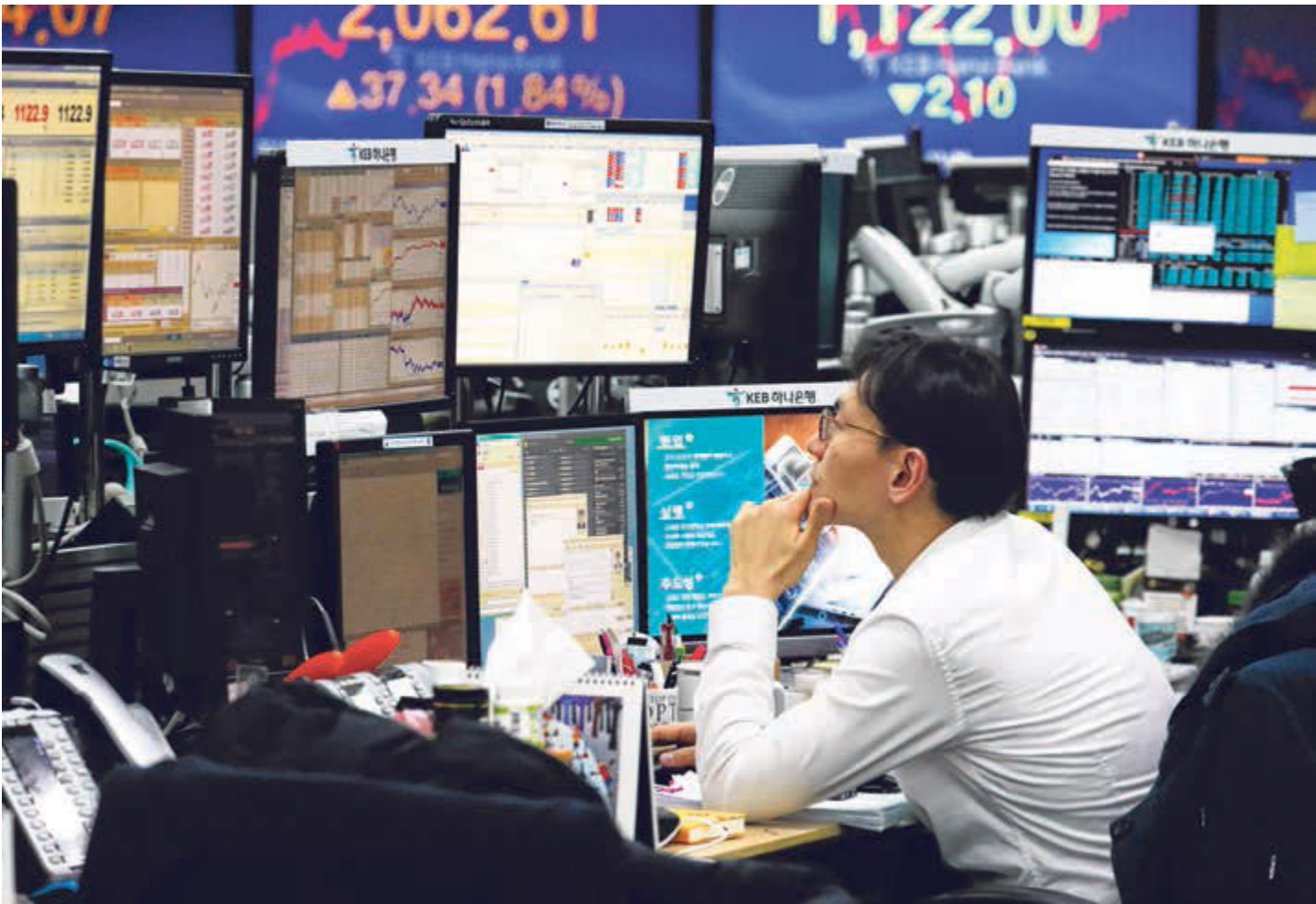
FTSE ST Large & Mid-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	CURRENCY LAST TRADED SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
286	245	Ascendas Reit	265	unch	13966	6	1.3
127	105	Ascott Reit	110	unch	1799	6.4	0.9
77	59	Bumitama Agri	65.5	+1	170	11	1.5
185	143	CDL HTrust	150	+1	1616	-	1
200	161	CapitaCom Trust	180	+2	15008	4.8	1
388	298	Capitaland	319	+1	7563	3.8	0.7
238	195	CapitaMall Trust	237	+5	20715	4.7	1.2
1360	780	CityDev	856	+7	1559	2.1	0.8
251	196	ComfortDelGro	217	unch	5609	4.8	1.8
3128	2265	DBS Grp	2424	+33	4113	5.9	1.4
968	767	DairyFarm USD	US931	+9	633	2.3	-
78	59	Far East HTrust	61	unch	1428	-	0.7
197	150	First Resources	160	unch	765	4.3	2.1
236	211	Fraser's Cpt Tr	223	+4	2271	5.4	1.1
119	101	Fraser's L&I Tr	104	unch	2470	6.6	1.1
141	85.5	Genting Sing	103	+2	41598	3.4	1.6
39	22.5	Golden Agri-Res	25	unch	6433	3.2	0.6
234	167	GuocoLand Ltd	179	-1	133	3.9	0.5
42	23	HPH Trust USD	US25.5	+0.5	3256	10.3	0.4
744	588	HongkongLand USD	US675	+5	2940	3	0.3
6974	5580	JMH USD	US6917	+129	362	2.3	0.7
4149	3155	JSH USD	US3783	+24	227	0.8	0.4
4126	2766	Jardine C&C	3627	+18	729	3.2	1.4
59	44.5	Keppel Infra Tr	50	+0.5	6330	7.4	1.8
892	567	Keppel Corp	618	+2	3661	3.6	1
133	108	Keppel Reit	117	unch	3106	4.9	0.8
151	125	Mapletree Ind Tr	207	unch	1918	3.2	1.3
273	170	Man Oriental USD	US187	-1	30	1.6	1.4
172	152	Mapletree Com Tr	172	+1	2625	5.3	1.2
213	184	Mapletree Log Tr	195	+1	1809	6	1.3
138	118	Mapletree NAC Tr	132	+2	5937	5.8	1.2
128	107	Mapletree NAC Tr	117	+1	6285	6.4	0.9
84	73	NetLink NBN Tr	77.5	unch	5915	-	1
1404	1036	OCBC Bank	1161	+11	6061	3.2	1.2
215	136	OUE	146	unch	78	2.1	0.3
92.5	64.5	OUE HTrust	68	+0.5	1680	-	0.9
250	157	Olam Intl	176	+3	383	4.3	0.9
60.8	28	Oxley	28.5	unch	1429	5.3	0.8
306	256	ParkwayLife Reit	268	-2	603	5	1.5
121	98	Raffles Medical	114	+4	2282	2	2.7
585	455	SATS	490	+2	1747	3.7	3.4
850	672	SGX	733	+6	2053	4.1	8.3
1184	914	SIA	951	+12	2850	4.2	0.8
337	220	SIA Engineering	249	+2	1176	5.2	1.9
292	231	SPH	245	-4	5096	5.3	1.1
109	98	SPHREIT	103cd	unch	2770	5.4	1.1
370	319	ST Engineering	356	+1	3098	4.2	5.2
169	123	Sembcorp Ind	162	+1	2152	1.9	0.7
281	149	Sembcorp Marine	162	unch	4143	1.2	1.4
58	39	Silverlake Axis	41	+0.5	5083	7.3	6
147	88.5	SingPost	94	unch	2913	3.7	1.3
365	283	Singtel	297	+3	19772	6.9	1.7
299	158	StarHub	175	+1	917	9.1	5.4
78	63.5	StarhillGbl Reit	68.5	unch	790	6.6	0.8
225	163	Suntree Reit	185	+2	6257	5.4	0.9
94.5	57.5	ThaiBev	65cd	+2	60628	1	3.2
10.2	3.7	Thomson Medical	8	+0.2	48722	-	2.9
3037	2380	UOB	2555	+38	2467	3.9	1.2
938	591	UOL	640	+9	1651	2.7	0.6
2965	1320	Venture Corp	1492	+65	1952	4	1.9
331	297	Wilmar Intl	319	+3	5264	3.1	0.9
244	183	Wing Tai	197	+1	291	4.1	0.5
166	84	YZJ Shipbldg SGD	129	+2	18995	3.5	0.9
191	116	Yanlord Land	130	+4	1675	5.2	0.5

FTSE ST Small-Cap Index stocks

52-WEEK HIGH	52-WEEK LOW	COMPANY	LAST SALE	+OR-	'VOL '000	GROSS YIELD%	P/BV
145	129	AIMSAMP Cap Reit	137	+2	604	7.5	1
71	48	Accordia Golf Tr	53	-1	1543	7.3	0.6
90.5	74	Ascendas-hTrust	78.5	-0.5	444	-	0.8
119	99	Ascendas-iTrust	106	unch	615	5.8	1.2
59.5	12.2	Asian Pay TV Tr	13.4	unch	2708	48.5	0.2
67	48	Banyan Tree	58.5	+0.5	629	1.7	0.8
279	115	Best World	262	+6	2349	1.6	9.4
87	76	Boustead	80	unch	79	3.8	1.2
126	79.5	BreadTalk	85.5	-0.5	464	8.2	2.3
658	521	Bukit Sembawang	564	+1	50	3.2	1.1
88.5	65.5	Cache Log Trust	70.5	-1	1743	10.3	1
57	39.5	Centurion	41	+0.5	127	6.1	0.7
171	104	China Aviation	110	+1	2814	4.1	0.9
47.5	29.5	China Everbright	32	+1	394	1.5	0.6
165	90.5	China Sunshine	129	+4	1323	2.3	1.4
107	64	Chip Eng Seng	68	+0.5	1970	5.9	0.5
53.5	31.5	Cosco	35	+0.5	5943	-	1.5
700	302	Delong	605	+2	13	-	0.6
28	17.5	Duty Free Intl	19.2	-0.7	50	9.6	1.2
79	67.5	EC World Reit	70	unch	929	8.6	0.8
59.5	47	ESR-REIT	53	+1	19433	7.3	0.9
142	92	First Reit	102	unch	617	8.4	1
155	134	Fraser's Com Tr	141	+1	1999	6.8	0.9
82.5	66.5	Fraser's HTrust	71.5	unch	850	-	0.9
28	16.4	Geo Energy Res	18.7	+0.7	2397	5.3	1.1
91	70.5	HRnetGroup	79.5	+0.5	10	2.9	2.4
70	52	Health Mgt Intl	55	+1	48	0.6	5.3
279	73	Hi-P Intl	92.5	+0.5	7681	27	1.4
283	252	Hong Leong Fin	259	-1	89	5	0.6
82.5	71	IREIT Global	74	+0.5	135	8	1
42	18.3	Indofood Agri	19.9	+0.2	138	-	0.2
79.5	43	Japfa	76.5	+1.5	3011	0.7	1.4
84.5	49	KSH	50.5	unch	12	4.4	0.9
86.9	53	Kep-KBS Reit USD	66.5	unch	1295	-	0.6
148	128	Keppel DC Reit	138	unch	6572	5.2	1.4
188	132	Keppel T&T	185	-1	322	1.9	1.2
119	7	KrisEnergy	82	+0.2	28534	-	1
79.5	44.5	Lian Beng	47.5	+0.5	64	4.7	0.3
42.5	18	Lippo Malls Tr	20	-0.5	1439	17.2	0.7
55.5	30	MM2 Asia	32	+0.5	1959	-	1.8
98.5	69.5	ManulifeReit USD	83	unch	374	6.7	0.7
121	95	Metro	101	+1	193	5	0.6
32		Noble	8.1	susp	-	-	-
66.9	45	OUE Com Reit	47.5	+1	1821	9.8	0.5
68	54	PEC	57	-1	20	3.5	0.6
46	17	POSH	18.5	+0.4	246	-	0.5
66	44.5	Q&M Dental	50	unch	198	3.2	3.6
117	55.5	QAF Ltd	60	-0.5	54	8.3	0.7
84	70	RHT HealthTrust	73	unch	602	6.2	1
124	96	Riverstone	111	-2	629	2.1	3.6
55	22	SIIC Environment	27.5	-0.5	681	-	0.5
45	38	Sabana Reit	40	-0.5	232	8.3	0.8
119	90	Sheng Siong	111	+1	1073	3	6.1
25.5	12	Sino Grandness	134	+0.6	1476	-	0.2
72	56	Soilbuild&BizReit	58.5	-0.5	647	9.8	0.9
129	80.5	Tianjin ZX USD	85.5	+2	276	-	0.7
50	32.5	Tuan Sing	35.5	unch	153	1.7	0.4
136	54	UMS	60	+1.5	3774	8.3	1.4
112	58.5	Valuetronics	69.5	+0.5	5918	6.6	159.1
17.8	8.3	Ying Li Intl	11.6	-0.1	6394	-	0.3
54.5	24	Yoma Strategic	34	-0.5	4361	0.7	0.9
37.5	16.1	Yongnam	18.8	+0.2	1496	-	0.4





A dealer monitoring stock prices at KEB Hana Bank in Seoul. Markets from Malaysia to China are oversold, analysts say. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

# Markets rally on optimism over US-China trade deal

## Receding fears of US recession, dovish Fed stance also play a role

Grace Leong  
Business Correspondent

Fresh hopes of a breakthrough in United States-China trade talks that concluded yesterday stoked a rally in stock markets from Europe to Asia and US futures for a fourth straight session.

China's Foreign Ministry said results of the talks would be released soon. The negotiations, which unexpectedly extended into a third day, fuelled optimism that the world's largest economies can avoid an all-out confrontation that would dis-

rupt the global economy.

Investors piled back into equities as fears of a US recession receded after last Friday's stellar December non-farm payrolls report and Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell's more dovish comments, which raised hopes the US central bank will pause further interest rate hikes until at least the middle of this year.

"The STI (Straits Times Index) rallied 145 points in the past four days. It's the sharpest rebound we've seen in the past two months. 3,200 is the next immediate resistance," CMC Markets analyst Margaret Yang noted.

"Singapore's fourth-quarter corporate earnings season starts in about two weeks. That will play a big role in determining market direction."

Singapore closed 1.12 per cent

MORE DATA TO WATCH

The STI rallied 145 points in the past four days. It's the sharpest rebound we've seen in the past two months. 3,200 is the next immediate resistance. Singapore's fourth-quarter corporate earnings season starts in about two weeks. That will play a big role in determining market direction.

”

CMC MARKETS ANALYST  
MARGARET YANG

higher yesterday, but is still 13 per cent down from its 52-week peak of 3,615.28 on May 2 last year.

Markets from Malaysia to China are oversold, analysts say, having lost between 12 per cent and 33 per cent from their 52-week high.

"Local companies' earnings will likely moderate at a slower pace as manufacturing and exports have been slowing in the last few months. But if they turn out positive earnings surprises, and the trade war ends and global economic recovery begins, the STI reaching 3,500 this year isn't entirely impossible," Ms Yang said.

Hopes of more stimulus injected to shore up China's slowing economy fuelled the rebound in equities and crude oil prices.

Pictet Wealth Management senior Asia economist Dong Chen noted: "While last week's move by the central bank will inject liquidity into the Chinese banking system... we expect the government to engage in more policy easing, such as corporate and value-added tax cuts, fiscal support for infrastructure investment and relaxation of property market restrictions."

Trading opportunities have emerged with several property developers trading at distressed valuations, following the July 6 cooling measures.

City Developments rose 0.8 per cent, CapitalLand edged up 0.3 per cent, Wing Tai gained 0.5 per cent, Far East Orchard jumped 1.7 per cent, and Chinese developer Yanlord Land climbed 3.2 per cent.

Stronger oil prices helped boost sentiment in Singapore's banks and offshore marine sector. OCBC rose 0.96 per cent, DBS jumped 1.38 per cent, UOB gained 1.51 per cent and Keppel Corp edged up 0.3 per cent.

UBS Global Wealth Management equity analyst Lee Wen Ching said she prefers banks because "this sector leads earnings growth in Singapore".

"Consensus forecasts 2019 earnings growth of 6 to 10 per cent for the sector. Banks are the clearest beneficiaries of rising interest rates, and excess capital buffers allow scope for higher dividends," she added.

Technology, electronics, industrial and consumer stocks are also getting a lift from the trade deal hopes. Venture Corp jumped 4.6 per cent. Even Genting Singapore and Singapore Airlines got a new lease of life, gaining 1.98 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively.

gleong@sph.com.sg

## Company Briefs

### Allen & Gledhill

One of Singapore's oldest law firms, Allen & Gledhill (A&G), has announced a strategic alliance with leading Indonesian law firm Soemadipradja & Taher (S&T).

Established in 1902, A&G has an associate firm in Malaysia, Rahmat Lim & Partners, as well as an office in Myanmar, A&G (Myanmar).

S&T, established in 1991, is one of Indonesia's largest independent full-service law firms and is consistently ranked in the top tiers of legal publications and directories.

Both firms said they will work together to offer integrated and holistic legal solutions comprising the best of Singapore and Indonesian law expertise.

They also announced that Mr Oene J. Marseille has recently joined A&G as partner (Foreign Law). Mr Oene is native Dutch, proficient in Dutch, Bahasa Indonesia, English, French and German, and has spent over 18 years in Jakarta. He will work closely with S&T to further expand the capabilities of the two law firms.

Ms Christina Ong, co-chairman and senior partner of A&G, said the alliance will greatly benefit clients who have established, or are intending to establish, businesses or operations in Indonesia as well as Indonesian clients looking at opportunities in the region.

Mr Rahmat Soemadipradja, senior partner of S&T, said both firms will work together to provide holistic and seamless service that their clients have come to expect.

### PAL Network

Singapore-based insurtech start-up PAL Network has signed two memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with Toyota Tsusho Corporation (Toyota Tsusho) and Allianz Malaysia to develop proof-of-concept (POC) using its blockchain technology for new smart contract-based insurance products.

Under one MOU, PAL Network will help facilitate underwriting and creation of new insurance products on smart contracts for Toyota Tsusho, the trading arm of the Toyota group. These will serve local markets within South-east Asia. "PAL Network looks forward to deepening its influence beyond Singapore, starting with Toyota Tsusho employees in South-east Asia," said PAL Network CEO and founder Val Yap in a statement yesterday.

Its other MOU with insurer Allianz Malaysia will see PAL Network implementing POC on new protection coverage with automated claims for the Malaysian market.

Separately, PAL Network has launched its own blockchain protocol at the end of last year. The protocol will have personalised, pay-as-you-go microinsurance products. It will also launch a B2B insurer's dashboard for insurers on Jan 14.

# Xiaomi sinks after billions of shares are unlocked for sale

HONG KONG • Many Xiaomi investors, who could only watch as the stock shed US\$14 billion (\$S19 billion) in market value, are now able to join in the selling.

Expiring yesterday was the six-month lock-up period that followed the firm's Hong Kong debut, during which some employees and cornerstone investors were banned from disposing of their allocated shares.

It has been painful: Xiaomi has dropped to HK\$10.34 from a listing price of HK\$17, losing another 6.9 per cent yesterday on almost seven times its average volume of the past three months.

Over three billion shares were unlocked, equal to about 19 per cent of those outstanding, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

The lock-up period for control-

**Xiaomi has dropped to HK\$10.34 from a listing price of HK\$17, losing another 6.9 per cent yesterday on almost seven times its average volume of the past three months.**

ling shareholders – such as chairman and founder Lei Jun – was extended yesterday for another 365 days, Xiaomi said in a statement. It was previously due to expire in July.

Touted by bankers last year as China's answer to Apple, Beijing-based Xiaomi sought a valuation

that would have made it the world's most expensive smartphone maker.

The stock trades at 16 times projected 12-month earnings, less than half its July multiple. It is still 32 per cent more expensive than Apple, which is reeling from its worst quarterly rout in more than a decade.

To be sure, longer-term investors may want to hold on to Xiaomi's shares rather than dump them at a loss. Analysts still predict Xiaomi will rebound to HK\$16.72 on average within the next year.

Hedge funds have been increasing their bearish bets, with almost 30 million shares sold short on Tuesday, the most since August.

Xiaomi attracted the likes of China Mobile and US wireless-chip giant Qualcomm as cornerstone investors last year. BLOOMBERG

## Interbank currency rates

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## WEE KOK POH RAYMOND

Age: 69

passed away peacefully on 9 January 2019.  
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Philip Mary Kanianthra

### Daughters:

Wee Geok Chan Samantha  
Wee Geok Peng Elysia

### Sons-in-law:

Andrew Tangye  
Tan Siong Kiat

### Grandsons:

George Tangye  
Bervin Tan Jun Hao

### Granddaughters:

Amber Tangye  
Bernice Tan Si Ling  
Berlynn Tan Si Hui  
Bervelle Tan Si Ying

And all Brothers, Sisters, In-laws, Relatives and Friends.

Wake is held at Blk 355 Tampines Street 33, Singapore 520355,  
Multi-Purpose Hall.

Cortege will leave on Friday, 11 January 2019 at 3.15pm for  
Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for cremation at 4.15pm.



## TAN YAH HOE IRENE

Age: 81

passed away peacefully on 8 January 2019.  
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Husband: Ng Chye Lee (Deceased)

Father: Felix Chong (Deceased)

Sisters: Teo Geok Yee

Teo Kim Lian @Ng Lian

Sons: Ng Chin Hwa, Felix

Ng Chin Seng, Winston

Ng Chin Choon, William

Ng Chin Huat

Ng Chin Chye, Jason

Daughters: Ng Siew Tin, Jennifer

Ng Siew Choo, Jasmine

Nephew: Kline Brandon Joshua

Grandsons: Alex Ng Kok Chuan

Willie Ng Jing Jie

Lim Hern Khoo, Kern

Conan Chow Yu Wei

Conrad Chow De Jun

Granddaughters: Sabrina Ng Li Ting

Freida Ng Li Qi

Valarie Ng Jing Hui

Isabel Ng Xue Qi

Ineza Ng Xue Xuan

Lim Poh Gek, Jade

Mother: Lim Soo Eng

Brothers-in-law: Michael Chan

Kline Terence Geoffrey

Daughters-in-law: Mettie Arini

Ng Bee Lan, Shirley

Choo Liaw Noi, Sharona

Goh Lee Hua, Christina

Shee Siew Leng, Jessica

Sons-in-law: Lim Boon Khuay, Michael

Chow Kok Seng

Niece: Kline Cheryl Rachel

Grandson-in-law: Goh Gao Ren, Alexander

Caregiver: Pyae Phyo Wai

Wake at Blk 897E Woodlands Drive 50 Singapore 734897.  
Cortege will leave on 12 January 2019 (Sat) at 12.30pm  
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 3 for cremation at 1.40pm.



## Kuppal Srinivasan d/o Late Appavoo Kandiar w/o Late S. Srinivasan

Age: 91

passed away peacefully on 09.01.2019  
Dearly missed & fondly remembered by loved ones.

Brother:

Narayanansamy Appavoo Kandiar

Sisters:

Appavoo Rukumani

Thailaimay Singaravelu (India)

Children:

S. Vengadasalam

S. Indira Devi

S. Sundaram

S. Venugopal (deceased)

Spouse:

R. Govindaama

V. Balakrishnan

Kalai Arasi Ramasamy

Grandchildren:

V. Kumar, Bhawani Devi Balakrishnan,

Dr. Iswaree Devi Balakrishnan,

Periya Sundaram, Harishini Sundaram

Great-granddaughters:

V. Diya Kumar, Mira Balagopal

Wake is held at Blk 28 Bendemeer Road,  
#08-681, S330028.

Cortege will leave on 10.01.2019 at 4.30pm to  
Mandai Crematorium for cremation.

Tel: 91895452 Indira Devi



## Loh Kye Cheong

Age: 70

Passed away peacefully on 8 January 2019.  
Dearly missed and fondly remembered by loved ones.

Wife: Lim Meng Choo

Sons:

Loh Chee Whye

Loh Chee Keet

Loh Chee Mun

Daughters-in-law:

Hor Lai Yin

Sim Li Jun

And all relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Block 28A Jalan Klinik,  
Singapore 160028.

Cortege leaves on Saturday 12 January 2019 at 3.15pm for  
Mandai Crematorium Hall 4 for cremation at 4.15pm.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want"  
Psalm 23:1



## Iris Tan

Age: 89

was called home to be with the Lord on 8 January 2019,  
dearly missed by loved ones.

Husband: Sebastian Tan Say Hye (Deceased)

Daughters & Spouses:

Celestine & Hank Lim

Celine & Benjamin Tan

Grandsons & Spouse:

Mark, Matthew & Jody

Kenn, Seann, Ryann

Godson & Spouse:

Timothy & Chris Tay

Great-grandchild:

Olivia Lim

Nephews, nieces, relatives and friends.

Wake is held at Singapore Funeral Parlour  
Tulip Hall Level 5, 91 Tampines Link S'pore 528746.  
Night service will be held on 11 January 2019 (Fri) at 8pm.  
Cortege will leave on 12 January 2019 (Sat) at 4.15pm  
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 2 for cremation at 5.15pm.



## Amaravathy d/o Palsamy

Age: 60

Passed away peacefully on  
8 January 2019, dearly missed  
and remembered by loved ones.  
She is resting at Block 547  
Bedok North Street 3 #05-1472  
Singapore 460547. Tel: 6246 3725  
Cortege leaves on Thursday  
10 January 2019 at 3.00pm  
for Mandai Crematorium Hall 4  
for cremation at 6.30pm.

"In memoriam"  
is for the loved  
ones whom you  
remember...

John 11:25 Jesus said: "I am the resurrection, and the life;  
he that believeth in me, though he were dead,  
yet shall he live."

## In Loving Memory Of 2nd Anniversary 10th Anniversary



## Foo Kia Tar

Departed on 10 January 2017



## Han Kim Wah

Departed on 21 January 2009

Dearly missed and fondly remembered by  
daughters Foo Lai Lee, Catherine Foo, Eleanor Foo  
and all their loved ones at home

Share  
the message of  
farewell with  
loved ones & friends



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SPORT

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SINGAPORE SLINGERS' WIN RECORD ON THE ROAD THIS ABL SEASON C8



Tottenham Hotspur striker Harry Kane tumbling to the ground in the penalty box after being fouled by Chelsea goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga. He converted the resulting penalty after the video assistant referee had its say. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

# ENGLISH REFS CAN'T EXECUTE VAR: SARRI

## Chelsea boss insists Kane penalty was wrong call, Pochettino says system 'kills emotions'

LONDON • It is not often that managers are on the same side of the fence when it comes to refereeing decisions, but Maurizio Sarri and Mauricio Pochettino were in unison when they spoke out against the video assistant referee (VAR) on Tuesday.

Chelsea manager Sarri complained about the Harry Kane goal which gave Tottenham a 1-0 advantage after the first leg of the League Cup semi-finals, suggesting that English referees are unable to use the VAR system.

Kane was upended by the Chelsea goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabal-

aga as he ran through in what was a clear foul inside the area, but there was controversy when the assistant referee raised his flag for offside against Kane before the incident.

After a lengthy 90-second VAR review, the Spurs striker was deemed to have been onside, the penalty was duly awarded and he scored.

But Sarri argued that the assistant referee had stopped the game when he flagged and, in the process, unnerved his defenders, who presumed Kane was offside.

In a further twist, he also suggested the technology had got it wrong. Having watched the replays

on Chelsea's feed, he insisted Kane was offside.

"Our camera was in line with Harry Kane and he was offside with the head and the knee," he said.

"Maybe the VAR camera was in a different position. But, from our position, he was clearly offside.

"It was also really important that the linesman stopped running with play - he had a big impact on our defenders. I don't think English referees are able to use the VAR system.

"If you are not sure with the system, you have to follow the ball and at the end of the action decide.

"But he stopped and didn't follow the ball - for our defenders, it was clearly offside.

"In Italy, there is VAR and, in the first season, it was a disaster. The referees did not know how to use

6

Harry Kane has scored in each of his last six games in all competitions for Spurs, equalling his best streak for the club (six games between October and November 2015).



the system. I think at the moment the (English) referees are not ready to use the system in the right way."

Despite the victory, Spurs manager Pochettino agreed that Kane's winner had left a sour taste.

"It's a system that sometimes kills emotions," the Argentinian said.

"Of course today, it was a little advantage for us and was a good decision for us, but I didn't celebrate because we were waiting for five minutes.

"To get the benefit is nice, but I am unhappy to win the game like this. I am pro-technology because you cannot stop evolution, but we were waiting so long (for the decision) - it is not clear what are the rules."

VAR, which was used at last year's World Cup and is set to be introduced in the Premier League next

season, was also in the spotlight during the weekend's FA Cup ties.

At one game, Burnley manager Sean Dyche was left bemused when a penalty decision in favour of his side against Barnsley was overturned just as Matej Vydra was in his run-up to take it.

Tuesday's incident drew mixed reactions from the pundits.

Former Chelsea midfielder Joe Cole said on Sky Sports: "VAR is supposed to take away the debate and make things clear-cut. But it's opened up a massive debate."

Former Spurs forward Robbie Keane believes the decision was right. He said: "I understand when defenders put their hands up and stop, but they wouldn't have caught him anyway. They were 10 yards behind Kane."

Meanwhile, London's Metropolitan Police arrested three men for a "racially aggravated public order offence" before the match.

It was understood the language used was allegedly anti-Semitic. The statement did not mention if the men were Chelsea fans or Tottenham supporters.

Spurs also announced yesterday that they will stay at Wembley until at least the end of next month as the finishing touches are put on their new 62,000-seater stadium.

The Premier League home games against Watford, Newcastle and Leicester will all be played at the national stadium. THE GUARDIAN, REUTERS, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

# Pogba's brother blames Mourinho for star's slump at United

LONDON • Paul Pogba's brother Mathias Pogba has hit out at Jose Mourinho over the Portuguese's treatment of the Manchester United midfielder.

The 28-year-old, who plays for Tours in France's third division, did not hold back in his criticism of the former United manager during an interview with RMC Sport.

Mourinho fell out with Pogba on a number of occasions during his 2½-year spell in charge of United.

He questioned Pogba's work rate and attitude in public and also at one point chastised the Frenchman in front of cameras at the club's Carrington training ground.

"It was Mourinho who was the problem," said Mathias, who is three years older than his World Cup-winning brother.

"Mourinho still wants to be the

centre of attention. The problem was Mourinho, right down the line. In the locker room, outside the locker room... Everything.

"He always wants to be the maestro, the centre of attention. Paul does not even calculate that aspect: you respect him, he will respect you, you trust him, he will produce big performances."

Mourinho left Pogba out of the United team for the final three matches of his tenure. The 55-year-old was sacked on Dec 18.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer then immediately recalled Pogba to the starting XI after being named caretaker manager for the rest of the season and the Frenchman has responded by scoring four goals in four games.

The former Juventus midfielder missed last Saturday's FA Cup

third-round win over Reading because of a leg injury he suffered in the Premier League victory over Newcastle United.

He had to have treatment on the injury over the weekend, meaning he was unable to fly out with the rest of the squad to Dubai last Saturday for their warm-weather training camp.

He joined up with his teammates on Monday and took part in training on Tuesday, suggesting that he will be fit for Sunday's league game away to Tottenham Hotspur.

Chris Smalling is a doubt because of a foot injury and fellow defender Marcos Rojo has been sent back to England after experiencing yet more problems in his recovery from a knee injury.

Midfielder Fred has been given permission to miss the five-day

camp because his partner is expecting a baby.

Solskjaer has encouraged his players to forge a competitive spirit in training and does not mind if tempers fray from time to time.

Referencing his own playing days, the Norwegian said: "We had one or two fights, but that is just the demand, the standards that you set.

"If the session ends with a little bit of a quarrel, I don't mind that because it means they are winners, they want to improve. If you settle for losing in training, you'll lose in a game when it really matters."

The 45-year-old is also unfazed by the prospect of facing Spurs, who beat United 3-0 in the reverse fixture in August.

"It'll be tough, but we can make it tough for them," he said.

THE TIMES, LONDON



Manchester United star Paul Pogba has scored four goals in four games since the sacking of former manager Jose Mourinho on Dec 18. PHOTO: REUTERS





Japan's Ritsu Doan shaping to shoot before scoring his team's third goal in their 3-2 Asian Cup Group F win over Turkmenistan yesterday. The Samurai Blue scored their goals in a 15-minute second-half spell to erase a 1-0 half-time deficit. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Asian Cup 2019

# OSAKO DOUBLE SAVES THE DAY FOR JAPAN

Four-time Asian Cup champions battle back from a goal down to beat Turkmenistan 3-2

GROUP F

Japan 3  
Turkmenistan 2

ABU DHABI • Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu admitted that his side were lucky to survive a scare to beat Turkmenistan 3-2 in their Asian Cup opener yesterday. The Samurai Blue thrived at last year's World Cup in Russia, reach-

ing the last 16 before they lost to the mighty Belgians. But they had to fight back from a goal down at half-time against yesterday's 127th-ranked opponents in their Group F clash in Abu Dhabi, courtesy of a quickfire double from Yuya Osako. "Somehow we managed to win," a relieved Moriyasu said in an interview immediately after the match. "I thought that the first match

will be a difficult fight... That is the difficulty of this competition. "But the players will not stop playing and they will fight as a team. "I think that it was good to win today for everyone... For the supporters who are here today and the supporters who are supporting in front of the TV in Japan." Turkmenistan captain Arslanmurat Amanov put the underdogs ahead after just 26 minutes at the Al Nahyan Stadium, unleashing a ferocious long-range drive that flew into the top corner. But Osako produced a smart turn to finish inside the box for Japan's

equaliser 10 minutes into the second half, after sustained pressure from the four-time Asian champions, who were playing without their experienced stars Shinji Kagawa and Shinji Okazaki. The Werder Bremen striker then put Japan in front four minutes later, tapping into an empty net after Yuto Nagatomo's dinked pass over goalkeeper Mamed Orazmuhamedov. Ritsu Doan added a deflected third after 70 minutes, but Ahmet Atayev smashed home a penalty 11 minutes from time for the Emirals to ensure a nervous finish for

the Japanese. Japan, who have failed to progress from the group stage only once since their debut in the competition in 1988, will take on Oman next and Moriyasu added that he is already looking forward to the match on Sunday. "We are improving in all parts and winning while growing in this competition. We will prepare for the best against Oman, do our best in the game. I want to aim for growth and also a victory," he said. Turkmenistan coach Yazguly Hojageldiyev was happy with his side's display despite the loss. "I was actually surprised how well we did in the first half," he said. "We lost our way a bit in the second half, but we're not out of it yet. We'll give everything in the next two games."

In another match yesterday, Uzbekistan joined Japan at the top on three points with a 2-1 win over Oman. Uzbek captain Odil Ahmedov gave his side the lead in the 34th minute before Mohsin Al Ghasani equalised in the 72nd minute. Eldor Shomurodov scored an 85th-minute winner for the 2011 semi-finalists. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Improved Saudis impress coach with North Korea rout

DUBAI • Saudi Arabia coach Juan Antonio Pizzi has praised his players for their commitment to learn and improve, following the 4-0 Asian Cup Group E thrashing of North Korea on Tuesday. The Saudis, humbled at last year's World Cup in Russia, looked far more at home in neighbouring United Arab Emirates as they tore 10-man North Korea apart. It was a performance that tagged Saudi Arabia as one of the teams to beat at the continental showpiece along with Iran, who thrashed Yemen 5-0 on Monday. "I'm very happy personally because normally the first game of a tournament, there are nervous moments," Pizzi told Abu Dhabi's The

National newspaper. "But I'm so happy and, hopefully, we will continue at the same level. "There's no doubt that the time you spend with a certain team allows you to get confidence, in yourself and your players as well. "But we notice from all the period we spent with the Saudi national team that our players are willing to learn and are ready to do exactly what we ask as a technical staff from them. "And they are doing it with very high commitment - even the new, younger players. "After the loss we suffered in the first game of the 2018 World Cup, the team understood perfectly that they have to do everything, do their

maximum, be organised and obey the orders we ask of them to be a better team." The Green Falcons attacked relentlessly in the opening stages and Hatan Bahbri put them in front in the 28th minute, turning defender Ri Il Jin inside out and firing into the far corner. They were 2-0 up nine minutes later when Hussain Almoqahwi's free kick glanced off the outstretched boot of Mohammed Al-Fatil and past Ri Myong Guk in the North Korean goal. North Korea already had a mountain to climb, but their plight worsened just before half-time when Han Kwang Song received his second yellow card for bringing down



midfielder Almoqahwi. Salem Al-Dawsari made it 3-0 with a smart finish on 69 minutes before Fahad Al-Muwallad bagged a soft fourth goal against an exhausted Korean defence three minutes from time. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Saudi Arabia players celebrating one of their four goals. They got their Asian Cup campaign rolling with a 4-0 win over North Korea. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

## Salah retains African football award

DAKAR • Egypt striker Mohamed Salah was named the African Footballer of the Year for the second straight year at the Confederation of African Football's (CAF) awards ceremony in Dakar on Tuesday. The 26-year-old Liverpool star finished first in a vote by technical directors and head coaches of 56 CAF member associations, with clubmate Sadio Mane of Senegal and Arsenal striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang of Gabon the other finalists. "This award is very big for me. I have dreamt of winning this award since I was a child and now I have done so twice in a row," said Salah, who won BBC's African Footballer of the Year award last month. Spotted by scouts from Swiss club

"My thanks go to my family, my teammates and my fans, and I dedicate this trophy to my homeland Egypt." It was an identical outcome to last year when Salah became only the second Egyptian after 1983 winner Mahmoud El Khatib to be voted the best footballer in Africa. Salah netted 44 goals in all competitions for Liverpool last season - his first with the Reds - and has bagged 13 Premier League goals so far this season. He was born in a northern Egyptian town Nagrig and used to make eight-hour return trips on buses to train with Cairo-based El Mokawloon (Arab Contractors). AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

Basel, he moved there in 2012 before joining Chelsea two years later. Salah found scoring difficult early in his professional career and was nicknamed "chancetod" (chance killer) by the Swiss media. Unhappy with his two-goal return, Chelsea loaned Salah to Italian outfits Fiorentina and Roma, then sold him to the latter club. Salah blossomed in Rome, averaging close to a goal every two matches, and Liverpool paid almost £37 million (\$63.8 million) to sign him two years ago. His next goal will be to match the four straight African awards won by former Manchester City and Ivory Coast star Yaya Toure. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS

### SportsWorld

#### Higuain set to leave Milan for Chelsea

MILAN • AC Milan striker Gonzalo Higuain has "agreed terms" and is set for an imminent move to Premier League football club Chelsea, Italian sports daily Gazzetta Dello Sport reported yesterday. Higuain joined Milan on a season-long loan from Juventus in July with an option to buy, but has struggled to settle at the San Siro, scoring eight goals in all competitions. The 31-year-old Argentine international will be reunited with former Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri at Chelsea, who will take over his €36 million (\$56 million) buy-out clause. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

#### French defender Pavard to join Bayern

DOHA • World Cup-winning defender Benjamin Pavard will join Bayern Munich from Stuttgart on a five-year contract on July 1, the defending German football champions revealed yesterday. Media reports in Germany put the transfer at €35 million (\$54.5 million) for the 22-year-old Frenchman who can play at right-back or centre-back. His stock skyrocketed last summer when he scored a net-busting strike in a 4-3 last-16 win over Argentina that set France on their way to the World Cup title. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

#### Violence mars Lazio's anniversary party

MILAN • Eight police officers were injured after celebrations to mark Lazio's 119th anniversary in the centre of Rome turned violent, police told Italian media yesterday. The skirmishes took place at Piazza della Libertà in the centre of the Italian capital, where up to 2,500 Lazio football fans gathered late on Tuesday. Shortly after midnight, an estimated 300 fans broke away from the main group and began throwing bottles and other objects at police, who responded with tear gas and water cannons. One fan was arrested and three others detained, all with links to the club's hardcore "Ultra" fans. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

#### Imahira gets invite to April's Masters

WASHINGTON • Japan's Shugo Imahira, last year's Japan Golf Tour money list winner, has accepted a special invitation to play in April's Masters tournament, Augusta National chairman Fred Ridley said on Tuesday. The 26-year-old will make his Masters debut after missing the cut in all three previous Major starts at the 2016 Open Championship, the 2017 US Open and the 2018 PGA Championship. The world No. 53 had 14 top-10 finishes last year and won his second career title at the Bridgestone Open. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

#### FOUR-DIGIT DRAW

Jan 09 2019

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SECOND ♦ 5543  
THIRD ♦ 7404

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Financial Statements

SPORTS FIXTURES HIGHLIGHTS				
Event	Home	Away	Timing	Venue
Thu, 10 Jan 2019				
Asian Cup	Bahrain	Thailand	7.00pm	LW
Asian Cup	Jordan	Syria	9.30pm	LW*
Fri, 11 Jan 2019				
Asian Cup	India	UAE	12.00am	LW*
LW* : Telecast available at Livewire(Marina Bay Sands) only Visit singaporepools.com for the latest 'Live' telecast listing.				
LOTTERY				
TOTO Fri, 11 Jan 2019, 9.30pm Draw No. 3439/2019				
Group 1 Prize \$5,000,000 est.				
Draw Venue: Singapore Pools (Private) Limited, 210 Middle Road, #01-01, Singapore 188994				
No person under the age of 18 years shall be allowed to purchase a ticket or to claim any prize. LW: Livewire (MBS) & Livewire (RWS) (21 years and above) Livewire (Singapore Pools) (21 years and above during 'Live' telecast) SB: SportsBuzz@Kiong (21 years and above) Singapore Pools Account Service. Call 6796 6688 for more details.				
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# WIE ON COURSE FOR HSBC TITLE DEFENCE

## Recovering from wrist surgery, American golfer eyes Thailand event before coming to S'pore

LOS ANGELES • Michelle Wie has said that she is likely to return from a right wrist surgery in time to defend her LPGA Tour title at the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore from Feb 28 to March 3.

The 29-year-old American has already resumed putting and chipping, posting photos and updates on her Instagram page, and appeared at a promotional event for equipment maker Callaway last week.

"I cannot wait. I'm so excited to get back out there," Wie said in a posting on the LPGA website that said she will likely be in Singapore for the HSBC event.

"The last couple of months have been pretty hectic. I've been doing my training, doing my workouts every day.

"I'm just excited to be healthy again and give it my all."

Wie underwent wrist surgery in October to repair a small fracture, bone spurs and a pinched nerve.

The world No. 33 played only 16 events last year, her fewest since the 2009 campaign. However, she managed to clinch five top-15 finishes, including a tie for 10th at the US Women's Open.

Last weekend on Instagram, she shared her delight at being able to putt and chip once more.

"Yesterday was the first time hitting putts longer than 4 ft and I have to say it felt REALLY good to make some clutch putts against @erikanderslang @brodiesmith21 in our little putting contest," Wie said.

"Let's just say...the competitive juices are realllllly starting to brew inside. Getting antsy to come back but I also realise that I need to be patient with my body."

She later posted a chip shot video, adding: "First day chipping!! Woohooo! I still remember how to hit a chip shot!"

Wie, who has won five LPGA events, ended a four-year win drought since her 2014 US Women's Open title by capturing her 2018 sea-

son-opener in Singapore.

According to the Golf Channel, she plans to travel to New York in two weeks to meet her surgeon, hoping that he will clear her to begin hitting full shots on Feb 1 and also give her the green light to play at the Honda Thailand event from Feb 21 to 24.

Wie's coach, David Leadbetter, has said that it will be wise for her to hone a swing that will be "kinder to all her joints".

"You'd like to design a swing that allows you to play without pain and the possibility of re-injury," Leadbetter said on the Golf Channel.

"She is chomping at the bit to play and she has a good attitude, but she has to be cautious. She has a lot of wear and tear on her joints over the years.

"But I think she still has some really good golf in her.

"There's no reason she won't be back on a very productive path, as long as she can stay injury-free."

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

• For tickets to the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore, visit [hsbcgolf.com/womens](http://hsbcgolf.com/womens)



US golfer Michelle Wie is hoping her surgeon will clear her to begin hitting full shots on Feb 1 and also give her the green light to play in Thailand from Feb 21 to 24. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

# Neo rues poor defence as Slingers fall to Hong Kong side

David Lee

With both sets of players fighting tooth and nail, diving onto the floor to retrieve possession and at times crashing into the advertising boards, the Singapore Slingers looked as if they had done enough to finally get one over their bogey team Hong Kong Eastern last night.

But, despite leading for the most of their Asean Basketball League match at the Southern Stadium in Hong Kong, the Slingers lost 88-81

and fell to sixth in the 10-team standings with a 6-4 record.

The Slingers seemed to have dealt well with Eastern's familiar foes – 2.29m Samuel Deguara and talisman Marcus Elliott – restricting the centre and guard to just 17 and 22 points respectively.

But they did not count on new guard O'Darien Bassett stepping up with 26 points, seven assists and four steals for Eastern, who had beaten the Slingers in the 2016-17 ABL Finals and edged them 92-89 after double overtime at the OCB

Arena last month.

Slingers coach Neo Beng Siang said: "Our defence was really bad, especially for the on-ball screens during which we got caught and let the opponents penetrate or take open jump shots."

The visitors had overturned a seven-point first-quarter deficit, and led 67-62 early in the final period after a Tay Ding Loon three-pointer.

But, despite Xavier Alexander's 29 points, Slingers centre John Fields struggled to convert, and Bas-



The Singapore Slingers have lost to Hong Kong Eastern both home and away this season.

sett came alive in the last quarter with 15 points, including three three-pointers, to help Eastern (7-4) complete the double over the Slingers and leapfrog them into fourth place.

The Slingers will make the short trip from Hong Kong to China as they take on the Zhuhai Wolf Warriors tomorrow.

With defending champions Alab Pilipinas (5-1) stunned 72-71 away at Westports Malaysia Dragons – who were inspired by Singaporean guard Jonathan Wong's 21 points

and match-winning lay-up – and Formosa Dreamers slipping to fifth after their 116-110 loss to Macau Black Bears, Neo still believes the Slingers can rise to the top.

He said: "I mentioned before this will be a competitive season and the results have proven that."

"I always have belief that the Slingers will be in it with a chance, but we must continue to work hard and improve on our defence, which has always been our foundation."

[davidlee@sph.com.sg](mailto:davidlee@sph.com.sg)

# Durant brushes off free agency rumours

OAKLAND (California) • Golden State Warriors star forward Kevin Durant insisted on Tuesday that he is focused on just playing and not on a potential free agent departure at the end of this National Basketball Association (NBA) season.

"I just focus on playing ball every single day," Durant said ahead of

Warriors' game against the New York Knicks – one of the teams that keep popping up in rumours as a potential Durant destination.

"I can't control what people say about me, or what they say about our future and what I should do."

"I come to work every single day and life will figure itself out."

The former NBA Most Valuable Player's future with the Warriors came under scrutiny in November after his spat with teammate Draymond Green, although Durant said that it would not influence his decisions about his future.

"I wish it was the other way, where talk was totally about the game, but I get it," the 30-year-old said. "Our league has grown so much in popularity. The sexy thing is what happens in the summer more so than what happens in the season – play-offs and free agency is the big thing now. I get it."

Durant had 24 points as Klay Thompson connected on seven three-pointers in a 43-point performance on Tuesday night, helping the Warriors defeat the Knicks 122-95 at the Oracle Arena.

With the win, Golden State (27-14) have snapped a three-game home losing run.

Mario Hezonja scored a team-high 19 points for the Knicks (10-31), who completed a 14-day, six-game trip with a fifth loss.

Thompson hit 18 of his 29 shots en route to his second 40-point game of the season. He had a season-best 52 at Chicago in October.

It was also the 12th game of the guard's career in which he scored more than 40 points.

Meanwhile, DeMarcus Cousins is set to make his Warriors debut during the team's Los Angeles road trip later this month, according to coach Steve Kerr.

The Warriors will play the Clippers on Jan 18 and the Lakers on Jan 21, and Cousins is expected to make his return in one of those two games from a torn Achilles tendon he suffered in late January last year. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, REUTERS, NYTIMES



Forward Kevin Durant taking a shot en route to scoring 24 points for the Golden State Warriors at the Oracle Arena on Tuesday. The 122-95 win over the New York Knicks halted the Warriors' three-game home losing run. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

WIN

tickets to the SMBC Singapore Open



Some of the world's best golf players will be in town for the Jan 17-20 SMBC Singapore Open and The Straits Times, in partnership with 100Plus, is offering ST readers a chance to soak in the action. Answer the following question correctly to stand a chance of winning one pair of passes (there are 5 pairs of general passes and 2 pairs of hospitality passes available).

Q: 100Plus is the Official Hydration Partner of the SMBC Singapore Open 2019.

A: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail your answers (subject header SMBC Singapore Open tickets), together with your name, IC and contact number to [yufan.ong@imsg.sg](mailto:yufan.ong@imsg.sg) by 5pm, Saturday, Jan 12.

#### TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Passes are not exchangeable.
- By entering this contest, you agree to share data (including personal data) with organisers solely for the purposes of this contest.
- The organisers' decision is final.
- Employees of 100Plus, IMSG and Singapore Press Holdings are not eligible to enter this contest.
- Passes to the tournament are valid only for admission to the Serapong Course at the Sentosa Golf Club and such other designated area(s) (the 'Venue') on the date(s) as shown. The Sentosa Island admission fee and vehicle fee shall still apply. Passes must be produced at appropriate entry points and/or on demand by any authorised official. Pass holders shall display their passes at all times whilst they are at the venue.
- All passes are personal to the holders and are strictly non-transferable.



# SPORT

## Ooi calls time on combat sports

She agonises over ‘break-up’ with MMA and jiu-jitsu; will take up sports administration

Sazali Abdul Aziz

For the last 18 months, former national swimmer May Ooi had put her life on a “standstill” as she trained to compete in mixed martial arts (MMA) and jiu-jitsu, the latter at the Asian Games level.

One particular set of e-mail drafts she penned lay unsent in her account for more than a month, but not because of her training and competition schedule.

These were e-mails that she had planned to send to the top executives of MMA organisation One Championship and the management committee of the Jiu Jitsu Association of Singapore (JJAS) to inform them of her retirement from competitive combat sports, which she finally sent last week.

She made the announcement in a statement on her Facebook page on Monday.

“I love competition so much and it’s such a big part of my DNA, so deciding to stop kind of felt like a break-up,” said the 42-year-old, who represented Singapore in swimming at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. “Because it’s MMA and jiu-jitsu I’m stopping, it’s like breaking up twice.”

When Ooi got a contract with One Championship in mid-2017, she gave herself until the end of last year to achieve two goals – to compete in One’s events and to represent Singapore in jiu-jitsu at the Asiad.

She achieved both, albeit without winning a title in MMA or a medal at the Asian Games, and was satisfied enough to call it a day.

But, when jiu-jitsu was confirmed in November as one of the 56 sports at the Nov 30-Dec 11 SEA Games in the Philippines this year, she agonised over staying on for another year.



teaching and grooming future athletes, and I think it’s the right decision by May,” said Kothagoda.

“We are a new NSA, so her experience in dealing with the various (sports authorities) on the high performance side of things will be very useful to us.

“She also knows how the athletes feel and what they go through.”

Ooi stressed that while she would no longer compete in a cage or out on the mat, she will in no way be detached from sport.

She now spends the bulk of her time teaching capoeira – a martial art that combines elements of dance and music – at the Brazilian Cultural Centre at Turf Club Road, and is also a motivational speaker; she was most recently a keynote speaker at the AIA Financial Advisers Kickoff event on Tuesday.

She is also working with Dr Teoh Chin Sim – who has served as a medical officer with the Singapore contingents at various major Games over the last 25 years – on the formation of a Women’s Sports Commission.

“I’m still heavily involved in sports, I’m just coming from a different side,” she said. “I have a lot of experience and value to give to our jiu-jitsu athletes who will be competing at the SEA Games.

“I also want to help develop a sporting culture for Singapore and getting Singaporeans involved in sports, particularly children.

“I’ve been an athlete, a coach, back to an athlete, and now sports administration... So I feel I’ve come full circle.”

Former national swimmer May Ooi had set herself two targets when she got a contract with One Championship in mid-2017 – to compete in the mixed martial arts organisation’s events and to represent Singapore in jiu-jitsu at the Asian Games. She achieved both goals which left her satisfied enough to call time on her competitive career. TNP FILE PHOTO

msazali@sph.com.sg

TAPPING ON HER EXPERIENCE

We are a new NSA, so her experience in dealing with the various (sports authorities) on the high performance side of things will be very useful to us. She also knows how the athletes feel and what they go through.



HENRY KOTHAGODA, president of the Jiu Jitsu Association of Singapore, on how May Ooi can contribute to the national body.



Ashleigh Barty ruined world No. 1 Simona Halep’s preparations for the Australian Open with a 6-4, 6-4 win at the Sydney International yesterday. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

## Halep shrugs off shock loss in Sydney

SYDNEY • World No. 1 Simona Halep remains unfazed despite her preparations for next week’s Australian Open suffering a huge setback yesterday when she was bundled out of the Sydney International at the first hurdle.

The Romanian had not played since withdrawing from the WTA Finals in October with a herniated disc, and was no match for fast-rising Australian Ashleigh Barty, who won 6-4, 6-4 to record the biggest win of her career.

Halep, the reigning French Open champion and 2018 Australian Open runner-up, had a bye through to the second round, meaning she

heads to Melbourne Park for the opening Grand Slam of the year with just one match under her belt.

“It was a great match after almost four months (out). I think I played a good level of tennis, but I had no inspiration in some important points,” said the 27-year-old.

“She played really well and deserved to win. But I was also very close to winning. No pain at all (in my back), that is a great sign.”

Earlier in the week, Halep admitted the back injury that ended her 2018 season early was “very scary”.

The early finish to 2018 was a disappointing end to a spectacular season, which saw her secure the year-

end No. 1 ranking for the second year running.

She had a stellar start last year, reaching the Australian Open final and going on to win the Shenzhen Open, Rogers Cup and her first Grand Slam title at Roland Garros.

Barty, who ended a breakthrough 2018 with a WTA title in Zhuhai and is now ranked 15th, advanced to the quarter-finals.

She had already accounted for another French Open winner, Jelena Ostapenko, in the opening round and had an extra gear against Halep, breaking serve twice to win the first set.

Halep, who split with Darren

Cahill last year and does not intend to employ a new coach for the first half of this season, was first to break in the second set and had a chance to hold for 5-3.

But Barty used her signature court craft to break straight back and secure victory two games later.

“It was extremely difficult conditions, very swirly down at court level. So I figured if I’m going to play Simona anytime, it was now. I was very happy to make the most of it,” said the 22-year-old.

“I had nothing to lose out here so I just came out and played with freedom. I believed I could win.”

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Korea’s Olympic champ accuses coach of sexual assault

SEOUL • South Korea’s double Olympic short-track gold medalist Shim Suk-hee has accused her former coach – already convicted and jailed for repeatedly beating her over many years – of sexual assault, her lawyer said yesterday.

Shim filed her complaint against Cho Jae-beom to police last month, on the same day she testified at his appeal against a 10-month jail sentence for physically assaulting her.

The 21-year-old has four Winter Olympic medals to her name, including relay golds at both Sochi 2014 and on home ice at last year’s

Pyeongchang Games.

Shim told police that her coach sexually violated her from the age of 17 until last January, a month before the Olympics, her lawyer said.

“This is a grave crime that our society should not overlook,” Im Sang-hyeok told AFP.

Some of the incidents took place at government-managed sports training centres, he added, demonstrating how vulnerable athletes can be to loopholes in the state management system.

Coaches in the country hold immense sway over athletes’ careers,

and physical and verbal abuse are known to be rife.

In addition, South Korea remains socially conservative and female sex crime victims can face public shaming.

Shim “kept it all to herself” until recently, Im said of the sexual assault allegations, “in fear of the potential stigma she could face as a woman and impact on her family as well as reprisals by Cho”.

She “mustered up the courage” to reveal the case in hope of preventing other athletes from suffering similar fates, he added.

In response to Shim’s accusations, South Korean authorities yesterday promised to strengthen penalties for sexual offenders.

Lifetime sport bans – currently applied to offenders convicted of rape or sexual assault – will be extended to those who commit sexual harassment, said its deputy sports minister Roh Tae-kang.

Cho has denied the sexual assault accusation, according to South Korean broadcaster SBS.

A ruling in the physical assault appeal is expected on Jan 14. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

### Next 48 Hours

#### TODAY

##### FOOTBALL

AFC Asian Cup Group A: Bahrain v Thailand (6.50pm), India v UAE (11.50pm). Gp B: Jordan v Syria (9.20pm) – Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208.

#### TOMORROW

##### BASKETBALL

ABL Zhuhai Wolf Warriors v S’pore Slingsers (StarHub Ch202, 8pm), Alab Pilipinas v HK Eastern (Ch201, 8pm).

##### FOOTBALL

AFC Asian Cup Group B: Palestine v Australia (6.50pm). Gp C: Philippines v China (9.20pm), Kyrgyzstan v South Korea (11.50pm) – Singtel TV Ch114 & StarHub Ch208.

LaLiga Rayo v Celta (StarHub Ch213, Saturday, 3.45am)

##### TENNIS

Sydney International S-finals (Singtel TV Ch115 & StarHub Ch209, 12.30pm & 5.30pm).

Live telecast times are subject to change. For latest updates, go to singtelv.com.sg & starhubgo.com or check the on-screen TV guide.



# life

**D** THE NOTORIOUS RBG  
Judge fought  
sexism in life  
and court  
**D5**

*The secret to living  
your dreams is to start  
living the life of  
your dreams today,  
in every little way  
you possibly can.*

– Mike Dooley

Live more.  
Bant less 



## CHINA CALLING

More former Mediacorp stars  
are moving to the country, which  
provides more job opportunities  
and potentially higher salaries



**Yip Wai Yee**  
Entertainment Correspondent

The pull of the Chinese entertainment market is so great at the moment, actors from all over – including Singapore – are being drawn there.

There is a lot of money being spent in China, which broadly translates to more working opportunities as well as the potential for higher salaries.

Malaysia-born actress Tong Bingyu, 35, revealed that her pay for working on a single television drama series in China was the equivalent of a year's salary in Singapore.

According to London-based analyst IHS Markit, it is the world's second biggest television market after the United States, as the country spent more than US\$10.9 billion (S\$15 billion) on TV programming in 2017.

China is also set to be the world's largest film market by 2020, with its domestic theatrical revenue estimated to reach more than US\$10 billion by then, according to reports.

Which is why, even though a handful of Singaporean actors have done the odd acting gig in China over the years, more have chosen to relocate in the hope of making a name for themselves there.

They include the likes of veteran names such as Tay Ping Hui, 48, who quit Mediacorp last year after being with the company for 20 years, to sign with Chinese entertainment company Perfect World Pictures (Singapore).

The partnership allows him more access to China-backed projects, which has led to a number of supporting roles in period Chinese TV dramas such as Fearless, a biopic about legendary Chinese martial artist Huo Yuanjia.

Never mind that in China, Tay is no longer the leading man. He tells The Straits Times that the whole point of heading there is to learn new things as an actor.

Malaysia-born Singaporean actress Julie Tan, 26, worked on at least two Chinese films after she left Mediacorp in 2017: the action and suspense film High-point Kills: Project X as well as crime drama Life And Death Of Qinming.

In an interview with Toggle in 2017, she said that going to China was an opportunity for her to broaden her scope and perhaps pave the way for bigger international projects, such as Hollywood-China co-productions.

There have been a few high profile success stories.

Malaysia-born Singapore actor Lawrence Wong, who was once relegated to playing mostly supporting roles on Channel 8, became an overnight sensation after starring in China's massively popular Qing dynasty drama Story Of Yanxi Palace (2018). He has racked up more than 2.9 million followers on Weibo and receives thousands of pieces of fan mail daily.

And former Channel 8 actor Ix Shen, 48, was the executive director – a cross between associate producer and assistant director – of the hit action flick Wolf Warrior II (2017), the all-time top-grossing film in China. He ventured to China in 2009.

Some are trying to straddle both places.

Young hunk Richie Koh, 25, has not quit Mediacorp, but entered a co-management deal with China's LongAllStar Entertainment Group. He is currently in Beijing attending auditions as well as taking lessons to hone his acting and Mandarin – hoping to open new doors for his career in China.



**'I don't  
need to be  
the leading  
man  
anymore'**

**TAY PING HUI, 48**

Home-grown actor Tay Ping Hui is one of the biggest names in Singapore television. Yet, he considers himself nothing more than "plankton" when asked about his status as an actor in China.

"No one cares who I am in China. I'm just a stranger from Singapore.

"Going there, I've had to put everything that I've done behind me and start from ground zero. I'm just plankton," he tells The Straits Times in a telephone interview recently while back in Singapore for a short trip.

Not that this bothers him in the slightest.

"In a way, this is pretty cool. It's like being a taekwondo black belt and then going over to MMA (mixed martial arts) as a total beginner.

"I feel like I can destroy all of my old habits and start afresh, and learn and absorb everything like a sponge again," he says.

"It's the joy of not having the burden of being 'Mr Tay Ping Hui' and just being an actor again."

Tay, the leading man of some of Singapore's most popular Channel 8 dramas, such as detective drama Unriddle (2010) and police procedural C.L.I.F. (2011), officially left Mediacorp last year to sign on with Chinese entertainment company Perfect World Pictures (Singapore) as an artist.

"I was doing well in Singapore, but it was time to go and try something else. Variety really is the spice of life," he says.

The move allows him more access to China-backed projects, although he actually got his first taste of working in China way back in 2007, when he was cast in period epic series The Legend And The Hero alongside the likes of Fan Bingbing and Steve Ma.

Then, in 2016, he played Genghis Khan in the Chinese period television epic Legend Of The Condor Heroes.

As those projects were filmed concurrently with his other work commitments in Singapore, he had to shuttle back and forth between the two countries.

Since he decided to focus on China last year, however, he has spent a lot more time there. He has clocked close to nine months in the city of Hengdian, where many of the country's largest film sets are located.

"Even though I'm alone there, I honestly don't feel bored. I'm quite a geek, so I am fine just staying in the hotel room and reading for days at a time.

"I'm also quite a foodie, so I like to go out in search of the best street food. Work has been really busy this past year in China, but I've also been having fun," says Tay, whose wife is based in Singapore. The couple have no children.

Tay Ping Hui plays a spy who fights the Japanese in Brave Heart 2, which will be telecast in China in the coming months. PHOTO: PERFECT WORLD PICTURES

PLAYING SUBSTANTIAL ROLES  
IN CHINESE PRODUCTIONS on D2



From D1

## Playing substantial roles in Chinese productions

The projects he has been working on in the past year will be telecast in China in the coming months – period war drama *Brave Heart 2* as well as period action dramas *Jue Dai Shuang Jiao* (Handsome Siblings) and *Fearless*.

Even though he is not the leading man in any of them, his roles are “substantial”, he says.

In *Brave Heart 2*, he plays a spy who works with the main protagonist to fight the Japanese during World War II.

In *Handsome Siblings*, the latest adaptation of the classic wuxia novel of the same name, he plays Yan Nantian, whom he describes as “the most invincible guy in the pugilistic world”.

As for *Fearless*, a TV series about the legendary Chinese martial artist of the same name (portrayed here by Vincent Zhao), Tay is Shalang – a criminal with a heart of gold.

He says: “These are not guys you forget about. They all have interesting stories and they’re always around the main characters, so you’ll remember them.”

“I think I’ve proven myself for years that I can carry a show, so I don’t need to be the leading man anymore.”

“I’m now looking for substance.”

Ask him about the biggest lesson that he has learnt from his time in China so far and he says that it is something he has known all along.

“However good you think you are, well, you’re really not, because there are at least a thousand guys better than you.”

“My philosophy now is that there will always be room for improvement. I will just keep working harder than ever while I can there because the reality is that if I screw up, 10 other people are waiting and ready to take over my job.”



However good you think you are, well, you’re really not, because there are at least a thousand guys better than you.

”

**SINGAPOREAN ACTOR TAY PING HUI**, on the biggest lesson he has learnt from his time in China. He plays Yan Nantian (above) in period drama *Handsome Siblings*.



Former Mediacorp actress Tong Bingyu, who used to go by the name Chris Tong, is working as a producer for a Chinese spy movie that has a \$60 million budget. PHOTO: COURTESY OF TONG BINGYU

## There’s big money if you’re lucky

**TONG BINGYU, 35**

The pay for acting in a single television drama in China can be the equivalent of almost an entire year’s worth of work in Singapore, says Malaysia-born actress Tong Bingyu.

The former Mediacorp star, who used to go by the name Chris Tong and who had quit the Singapore company early last year, had previously claimed that was how much she was paid for her appearance on the upcoming Chinese TV period drama series *One Boat One World*.

She sounds hesitant when pressed, however.

Speaking to The Straits Times in a telephone interview recently, the 35-year-old says in Mandarin: “It’s true that it is possible to get a lot more money in China. The market there is huge and if you get picked for big projects, you can be well compensated.”

“But I don’t want people to get the wrong idea that it’s easy money. Just because you pack up and move to China doesn’t mean you will be rich. It also depends a lot on luck and whom you know.”

Her stroke of luck came four years ago when she met a Chinese producer from popular TV channel Hunan Television through a good friend.

That producer eventually helped set her up for acting gigs in China.

Besides *One Boat One World*, Tong also snagged a role in the wuxia drama *The Heaven Sword And Dragon Saber*, which is based on Louis Cha’s novel of the same name.

Tong says of the producer: “She gave me so much solid advice. She pointed out very frankly that I’m not that young anymore and that I should diversify.”

Which is why she decided to try her hand at producing as well.

Currently, she is busy working as a producer on the Chinese action spy movie *Zhi Sheng Si Yu Du Wai* (Beyond Life And Death), which boasts a budget of 300 million yuan (\$60 million). She was roped in after she met famed Hong Kong producer Manfred Wong, who is also behind the film.

Tong, who is managed by her Malaysian husband Kee Kai Loon, 40, says: “It’s stressful because I’m so new to this job, but it has also been very exciting. I’m suddenly asking questions like, ‘How much does this cost? What will it look like?’”

“When I was at Mediacorp, I was such a passive person – I just went to work to act.”

The film, which she describes as an explosive actioner in the vein of China’s hit war films *Operation Red Sea* (2018) and *Wolf Warrior* (2015), is slated for release later this year.

Coming up, she will also produce a Chinese Web series, for which she declines to reveal the details.

When she was in Singapore, the actress played the lead in Channel 8 shows such as family drama *Mightiest Mother-In-Law* (2017) and nursing drama *The Caregivers* (2014).

“I will unlikely get the same star status as an actress in China and that’s okay. The reality is there are so many younger and more beautiful actresses who have been working in China for much longer than I have,” says Tong, who has been based out of Beijing for the past two years.

“I just take every day there as an opportunity to learn new things. Besides, now that I’m doing the producing thing, I realise that I’m loving it. If all goes well, I might be a producer full-time in the future.”

Yip Wai Yee

It’s true that it is possible to get a lot more money in China. The market there is huge... But I don’t want people to get the wrong idea that it’s easy money.

”

**TONG BINGYU**

## Horror K-drama that is full of surprises

**Yip Wai Yee**  
Entertainment Correspondent

South Korean television drama *Priest* may be a horror series about exorcism, but lead actor Park Yong-woo says that there is so much more to it.

In an e-mail interview with The Straits Times, the 47-year-old says: “This is a production that isn’t just about inducing fear, but it also portrays the theme of love.”

*Priest*, which is streaming on Viu, is set in a Catholic hospital where patients appear to be afflicted by supernatural elements. Park plays an older priest who works closely with a younger priest (played by Yeon Woo-jin) to fight the evil spirits possessing some of the bodies.

Each episode has them wrestling with the doctors and patients on the notions of science versus faith.

Park adds that despite the dark premise, the show often takes a “light and humorous approach”.

“My character Moon Ki-seon is a



three-dimensional figure who is good at sports and also has a sense of humour,” he says.

The series, which premiered in November last year, has received modest ratings, but has been well-reviewed. Fan comments online have all pointed to how the show is “so twisty” and “unpredictable”.

The surprises in the show are

partly the reason the actor decided to take it on.

Says Park, who has appeared in such diverse projects as thriller film *Handphone* (2009) and dark romantic comedy *My Scary Girl* (2006): “I prefer doing projects that have themes or characters that are less predictable. For *Priest*, I am trying my best to present to the audience a

sense of horror that is unfamiliar.”

He was also excited about the prospect of working with Yeon, 34, a rising star who was nominated for Best Actor at the 6th Korea Drama Awards for the romantic drama *When A Man Falls In Love* (2013).

Park says: “He is an actor who is not only positive, but also flexible. The moment I heard that I was

going to collaborate with him for *Priest*, I was really looking forward to it.

“In the show, even though I appear to treat him coldly, his character doubles as a friend whom I can joke around and chat with.”

• New episodes of *Priest* are available on Viu every Sunday and Monday.

PHOTO: VIU





Benedict Cumberbatch in *Brexit: The Uncivil War* as political strategist Dominic Cummings, who was hired by the Vote Leave camp to convince Britons to quit the European Union. PHOTO: BBC STUDIOS

ScreenTest

# Real-life evil genius and deluded royal ‘descendants’

**Brexit: The Uncivil War** leans too hard into a farcical tone and **The Romanoffs** pays off when it examines relationship twists



Alison de Souza

**Brexit: The Uncivil War** feels like a post-mortem performed while the patient is still alive, and is just as painful. This new BBC film dramatises the political manoeuvring on both sides of Britain's 2016 referendum on quitting the European Union (EU). It dissects the reasons behind the Vote Leave campaign's victory – a political earthquake that is still producing aftershocks. Sherlock star Benedict

Cumberbatch plays political strategist Dominic Cummings, the real-life evil genius hired by the Leave camp to convince voters to say yes. What resulted was an onslaught of misinformation to foment xenophobia – for example, stoking fears of a tsunami of immigration – and mislead Britons about how much money they pay into the EU versus the considerable benefits they get, not to mention the economic and financial benefits of remaining in the bloc. Behind the campaign – an unholy alliance between the far-right UK Independence Party, Eurosceptics from the ruling Conservative Party and Tory leaders driven less by ideology than ambition. What the 125-minute film does well is capture the myriad reasons people voted to leave. Focus groups held by both sides serve as a vox populi, showing how the vote split demographically and often in ways that were irrational and self-sabotaging. You can see the film-makers trying to be even-handed. But inevitably, it is the Leavers who

come off looking worse. Depending on the viewer's own politics, this will be hilarious, infuriating or depressing. The movie also shines a light on the dark arts of micro-targeted advertising to appeal to such groups. The overall message – about the dangers of this technology and the pitfalls of populism – has not been addressed nearly enough in popular entertainment. At the same time, it leans too hard into a farcical tone and its main character, Cummings. Aside from being a walking trope (the same misanthropic genius the actor plays in *Sherlock*, 2010 to present), the depiction may buy too much into Cummings' own spin about how much his tactics really influenced the outcome. Doing so ignores factors such as randomness, irrationality and incomplete information, which makes it hard to appraise events in recent history. The movie does not make things all that much clearer. Television anthology series have been making a comeback in recent

years and the requirements for success seem to be a robust unifying theme, sufficient variety from one episode to the next, and some consistency in quality across the board. **The Romanoffs** starts off well enough in its first few episodes. Each of the eight revolves around a person who believes he or she is descended from the royal family executed in the Russian revolution – but this is interpreted loosely enough that the stories span different genres, tones and countries. Its creator, director and writer – Matthew Weiner of *Mad Men* (2007 to 2015) – certainly assembled enough star power, with actors such as Aaron Eckhart, John Slattery and Diane Lane appearing across multiple episodes. Weiner loves an artfully staged set and does not settle for anything less than stunning cinematography. But the best instalments are the ones that focus less on visuals and more on human psychology and surprising turns in interpersonal relationships. The first episode, *The Violet Hour*, does just that. Eckhart is the nephew of a xenophobic old lady, Anushka (Marthe Keller), and is waiting for her to die so he can inherit her fabulous apartment. But a Muslim girl hired as her carer – played by Ines Melab – disrupts everyone's plans. Another, *The Royal We*, looks at what happens when two people who are unhappily married are presented with a chance to cheat. These and other chapters also hint at the double-edged sword of thinking you come from a great-but-tragic line of Russian royals. But episodes such as *House Of Special Purpose* – starring Christina Hendricks as an insecure actress trapped on a nightmare TV set – and *Panorama*, about a journalist falling for the mother of a sick boy, feel more like throwaway film-school experiments. *The Romanoffs* is worth dipping into, but do not hesitate to skip a few episodes and fast-forward liberally.



Aaron Eckhart and Marthe Keller in *The Romanoffs*. PHOTO: AMAZON PRIME VIDEO

**VIEW IT / BREXIT: THE UNCIVIL WAR**

BBC First (StarHub TV Channel 522) and BBC Player (www.bbcplayer.com) ★★☆☆

**THE ROMANOFFS**

Amazon Prime Video ★★☆☆

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## Four services join streaming wars

**NEW YORK** • In 2007, people rolled their eyes when Netflix decided to stream movies rather than just mail them DVDs. But fast-forward about a decade and it is hard to recall when folk were not binge-watching *Stranger Things* (2016 to present) or sharing streaming-service passwords. Netflix, Hulu, Amazon and other streaming apps now generate a lot of original content – 160 scripted shows, almost a third of the record 495 on all of television, according to FX Networks Research. Thirty-three million Americans cut the cord on cable last year, so it is no surprise that more companies want in on the streaming game. Here are some of the new streaming options in America.

**DISNEY+**

**Strategy:** Disney owns your childhood and probably your present and future, so it is betting you will pay for your favourite shows and movies  
**Cost:** Supposedly lower than Netflix's US\$8 (\$S10.85) to US\$14 monthly fee

With so many brands under the Disney umbrella, it would probably be easier to name franchises that do not belong to the House of Mouse. From powerhouses such as *Star Wars* and *Marvel* to animated classics such as *The Lion King* (1994), Disney has a massive stable of content to attract subscribers to Disney+. It will also be creating shows. Netflix has a lot to lose in this competition. Disney content makes up 8 to 12 per cent of Netflix's total viewership in the United States, according to video-measurement firm 7Park Data. Once the distribution deals end, all that content will be available only on Disney+, as will upcoming releases such as *Captain Marvel*.

**APPLE**

**Strategy:** You get free shows  
**Cost:** Zero if you own an Apple device

Apple's upcoming service will offer original content and access to existing services such as HBO. What is key is its plan to roll out original content free to Apple device users. Apple now offers shows such as *Carpool Karaoke* behind a paywall, but the upcoming TV app will come pre-installed. But since its content is free, Apple has to be extra careful with what it produces – which is why it is reportedly focusing on PG-rated shows. Tie-ups include one with media mogul Oprah Winfrey to create shows, while director Steven Spielberg's Amblin Television and NBC-Universal will partner Apple to reboot his 1980s anthology series, *Amazing Stories*.

**FACEBOOK WATCH**

**Strategy:** Facebook knows everything about you. Now it is using that information to personalise your viewing experience  
**Cost:** Free

Video suggestions are based on what you and your friends are already watching. You can also organise a Watch Party if you are the administrator of a Facebook group. Facebook is betting big on its streaming platform – it was expected to spend US\$1 billion to US\$2 billion on original content last year and renewed four of its original series for this year.

**DC UNIVERSE**

**Strategy:** It has TV shows, movies, comics, an encyclopaedia, a shop, forums and basically all the content a comics fan could want  
**Cost:** US\$7.99 a month or US\$74.99 a year

DC Universe, which launched in September last year, is primarily for comics and superhero fans. DC Universe has already debuted one original show – *Titans* – and has plans for more. WASHINGTON POST





Indian-American actor Rohan Chand plays the titular character in *Mowgli: Legend Of The Jungle*. PHOTOS: NETFLIX

# No song and dance in this jungle

**Rudyard Kipling’s feral child takes centre stage in *Mowgli: Legend Of The Jungle*, which has a darker tone than Disney’s films**

**John Lui**  
Film Correspondent

Andy Serkis might be a little late to the party with the film *Mowgli: Legend Of The Jungle*. It comes out two years after Disney’s *The Jungle Book* (2016), which, like the film Serkis directed, is based on the stories of English writer Rudyard Kipling. That is as it has always been, Serkis notes. “Classic pieces of literature always bear retelling,” he says of Kipling’s *Mowgli* stories, which were written around the turn of the 20th century. “Different actors and directors bring something fresh and new,” adds Serkis, who, before he took the director’s chair, was best known as the actor whose movements were captured for computer-generated characters such as Gollum in *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy (2001 to 2003) and Caesar in the *Planet Of The Apes* franchise reboot (2011 to present). The 54-year-old spoke at a media

roundtable in Singapore late last year, when he appeared at Netflix’s See What’s Next: Asia press event. *Mowgli* is now streaming on Netflix. It features the voices and motion-capture performances of Christian Bale as Bagheera the panther, Cate Blanchett as Kaa the python and Benedict Cumberbatch as Shere Khan the tiger. Serkis, besides directing the film, appears as Baloo the bear. Indian-American actor Rohan Chand is *Mowgli*, a feral child raised by wolves. What sets Serkis’ version apart from the two famous Disney adaptations (1967 and 2016) is that he puts the character of *Mowgli* front and centre. The tone is also heavier, compared with Disney’s upbeat and more music-oriented takes. “The stories were written around the 1890s and they are about India. They are culturally specific. They are about a young boy searching for his identity... There are real consequences and there is no automatic happy ending,” Serkis says. Kipling believed that superior Western cultures ought to reign over inferior Asian and African ones, an attitude that permeates some of his writing. Serkis says he is aware of the author’s notions about race and culture. “He was a new voice for the working classes, but later on in his life, he was seen as borderline racist and



**We focus on aspects like class, otherness, the different tribes vying for supremacy and colonialism, how the jungle is being taken over by man. I don’t think any other version has gone near dealing with those things.**



**ANDY SERKIS** (above), who directed and also plays Baloo the bear in *Mowgli: Legend Of The Jungle*

imperialist,” Serkis says. His film addresses Kipling’s baggage, but “not in an overtly political way”. “We focus on aspects like class, otherness, the different tribes vying for supremacy and colonialism, how the jungle is being taken over by man. I don’t think any other version has gone near dealing with those things,” he says. Rather than use traditional animation, Serkis opted for motion-capture performances. These entail having actors perform their roles as they would in a live-action film, while wearing suits that allow expressions to be digitised and then accurately overlaid on fantasy creatures. He prefers this to pure animation, which requires actors to use only their voices, often in isolation in a recording studio. Character expressions are then interpreted by the director and animation team. For Serkis, the priority was to catch the sparks that fly when actors are performing together in the same room. “Drama is about what happens between two actors. To have the actors there playing those parts – it is a different level of connection compared with animation,” he says.

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● *Mowgli: Legend Of The Jungle* is streaming on Netflix.

## Eastwood returns as entertaining, elderly outlaw

**REVIEW / BIOPIC DRAMA**

**THE MULE (M18)**  
117 minutes/Opens today/★★★☆☆

**The story:** Earl Stone (Clint Eastwood) has an ex-wife and children who despise him and his horticultural business is dead. An old pick-up truck is all the 90-year-old has left. Then someone approaches him with a job proposal: haul cargo, no questions asked, from one state to another. The Mexican cartel wants Stone for the job because he is the least likely to be stopped by police as he is white, has a spotless traffic record and is old. Based on the life of Leo Sharp, a man who was known as the world’s oldest drug mule after he was arrested in 2011 at age 87.

**John Lui**

This biopic, unlike *On The Basis Of Sex*, about the life of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, puts the spotlight on a person who broke the law, instead of upholding it. The last time Eastwood acted was in 2012’s baseball drama *Trouble With The Curve*. It is a pity, then, that this lacklustre take on the idea of a good man who crosses to the dark side – a theme explored with much more interesting results in the television series *Breaking Bad* (2008 to 2013) – is the project that brought him back as actor and director.



Clint Eastwood directs and acts in *The Mule*, which is based on the life of Leo Sharp, who was known as the world’s oldest drug mule after he was arrested in 2011 at age 87. PHOTO: WARNER BROS

This is Eastwood smack dab in his comfort zone, playing a man who squints at the world and sees only slack-jawed morons looking back at him. In gently comic setups, he is vexed by texting, mobile phones and members of his family. The story has sly fun with how cops are so racist and ageist that their blindspots allow the cocaine-packing nonagenarian to slip past. Unlike, say, the grump he played in *Gran Torino* (2008), Eastwood’s Stone is shown in flashback to have been once a dapper fellow and ladies’ man, eager to share his love

of flowers with fans. Beyond that, there is not much here by way of character insight. Stone’s “breaking bad” moment, when he walks over the line from honest citizen to drug mule, happens with unseemly haste. He seems to be untroubled by the morality of his enterprise, the hazards posed by his gun-happy Mexican associates or the risk of capture by law enforcement. In a lazy bit of writing that is supposed to redeem his character – and it is unclear if it happened in real life – Stone is shown to be a

good Samaritan who uses his ill-gotten gains for good. Any time that might have gone towards making Stone a fuller, more interesting protagonist is wasted on an undercooked thriller sub-plot involving cops played by A-listers Bradley Cooper and Michael Pena, a thread as devoid of snap and crispness as wilted lettuce. Of the two biopics this week – one about an elderly outlaw, the other about extraordinary jurist Ginsburg – this story is the less earnest and, on that account, the slightly more entertaining.

### Top10Movies

#### SINGAPORE

1. (2) Aquaman
2. (1) Bumblebee
3. (3) More Than Blue
4. (-) Make It Big Big
5. (5) Master Z: The Ip Man Legacy
6. (4) Mary Poppins Returns
7. (-) Second Act
8. (7) The Possession Of Hannah Grace
9. (-) Suzzanna: Buried Alive
10. (6) Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse

● Information from Cinematograph Film Exhibitors Association

#### UNITED STATES

1. (1) Aquaman
2. (-) Escape Room
3. (2) Mary Poppins Returns
4. (4) Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse
5. (3) Bumblebee
6. (5) The Mule
7. (6) Vice
8. (8) Second Act
9. (9) Ralph Breaks The Internet
10. (7) Holmes And Watson

● Information from boxofficemojo.com



# Beating sexism to rise to the top



Felicity Jones stars as American Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in *On The Basis Of Sex*. PHOTOS: ENCORE FILMS, REUTERS

**On The Basis Of Sex is based on real-life Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who gave her blessing to make the film**

**Alison de Souza**  
In Los Angeles

In her 80s, American Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has become an unlikely pop-culture darling among liberals in the United States, especially millennials. Because of her spirited disagree-

ments with her conservative colleagues and history of fighting for disadvantaged groups, the 85-year-old has acquired a patina of cool unprecedented for a Supreme Court judge.

This has inspired countless memes, the rapper-worthy nickname "Notorious RBG" and, now, a feature film, *On The Basis Of Sex*, which opens in Singapore today.

Felicity Jones (*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, 2016) plays Ginsburg as a tireless young lawyer and devoted wife and mother.

She is shown overcoming rampant sexism and other obstacles – including raising a child and nursing a sick husband while she was in Harvard Law School – before launching a ground-breaking case to reverse gender discrimination in the United States.

Speaking to *The Straits Times* and other press in Beverly Hills last year, the cast and screenwriter – Ginsburg's nephew Daniel Stiepleman – say they had the judge's blessing to make the film.

Jones, 35, says: "Ruth had been involved from the very beginning and, like a good lawyer, she'd been meticulous about (reading) all the drafts of the script. She had approved all the casting.

"We had her blessing, which I feel is the only way that you'd want to make something like this, which is such an intimate portrait."

Stiepleman, 35, says his aunt "loved the movie". After seeing it, she said: "I'm just so glad it's joyous – that's what the 1970s were like for me. As feminists, we weren't angry all the time, we weren't depressed. We felt like the world was changing

for the better and we were at the forefront of that change. It was a really optimistic time."

The cast also reveal that Justice Ginsburg was rather taken with Armie Hammer, the *Call Me By Your Name* (2017) actor who plays her beloved late husband Martin Ginsburg.

When the actors first met her, "she couldn't take her eyes off Armie", Jones recalls with a laugh.

The British actress, who was Oscar-nominated for the biopic *The Theory Of Everything* (2014), says it was intimidating portraying the judge.

"I was taking on one of the most beloved and most iconic women in history, so I definitely didn't take it on lightly."

"And then meeting Justice Ginsburg herself, we were all quite nervous because you have so much respect for her integrity. There aren't many people around at the moment in positions of power who have their principles intact. So at first you kind of want to curtsy or bow."

Besides her stellar career, the movie explores Ginsburg's relationship with her husband Martin and her daughter Jane, who both supported her legal ambitions.

But according to a recent *New York Times* interview with Stiepleman, the film had trouble getting financing because potential backers felt it was "far-fetched" that Martin was so supportive and wanted to see more conflict between the two.

Yet this was simply not the case, the writer says.

"My first instinct was that terrible cliché of, 'Oh, she's a working mum

– therefore she's too busy to deal with her kids and they must have tension about that.' But the fact that it was a true story meant that I couldn't fall back on cliché – I had to go with what was there."

"I went to Jane and said, 'Did you feel neglected because your parents were both working?' And Jane said, 'Oh, I would have killed to feel neglected.'"

Stiepleman drew on what he had seen of the Ginsburgs' marriage himself.

"My wife and I really looked to Ruth and Marty as our role models – like, this is what a marriage is supposed to look like. I was in this privileged position where I had them as role models and it helped my marriage and it helped my career and it helped me to be a better man and a better father. And I realised that was something I could share with other people."

As idyllic as Justice Ginsburg's marriage was, however, Jones says it was important to reflect the very real struggles in her life.

"It's so important telling this story about how difficult it was for Ruth Bader Ginsburg – how she was fighting on every single front, not only because of her gender, but also because she didn't come from a privileged background."

"She had doors continually slammed in her face and (it's about) how much strength and persistence it took to get to the position she is in."

stlife@sph.com.sg

● *On The Basis Of Sex* opens in cinemas today.



**She couldn't take her eyes off Armie.**



**ACTRESS FELICITY JONES** on Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg (left) being rather taken with Armie Hammer (above), who plays her late husband in the movie

## Judge biopic does not do her justice

### REVIEW / BIOPIC DRAMA

**ON THE BASIS OF SEX (PG13)**  
120 minutes/ Now showing/ ★★☆☆

**The story:** This biopic of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, begins with her (Felicity Jones) entering Harvard Law School in 1956. She is married

to Martin Ginsburg (Armie Hammer) and the mother of an infant daughter. As one of nine women in a class of 500, she faces hostility from both her professors and classmates, in spite of her stellar performance as a student. The film ends in the 1970s, when she and her team of civil rights lawyers take up a case in which a man has been discriminated against because of his sex.

### John Lui

The 85-year-old Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is an unlikely pop icon.

She is affectionately mimicked on the comedy show *Saturday Night Live* and is on T-shirts bearing the moniker "Notorious RBG", a play on a late rapper's name.

In a United States that has chosen a president who aims to turn back the clock to the time before feminists and racial minorities "ruined" the nation, Ginsburg's reputation as a progressive has made her an Internet meme embraced by the embattled left.

Which is why this biopic about the woman who was appointed to the highest court in the US by President Bill Clinton in 1993 is being released now.

The timing makes good marketing sense, but did the movie have to be such a bore?

It opens with Ginsburg entering Harvard Law School, a place that welcomes women as long as they keep their heads down and never embarrass the male students by appearing smarter than them.

In a series of clashes with chauvinist students and harrumphing professors, she is rarely the victor, more the victim – the scenes include one in which she struggles to find a job in firms that do not hire women – and she tends to walk away, frustrated.

Her solace lies in the arms of her beloved husband Martin (Hammer) and children.

That odd emphasis on her softer side might have to do with underwriting or the Hollywood rule that women protagonists must never be

as tough as a male or risk becoming the dreaded S-word – shrill.

That insecurity about getting into the gritty details of what it takes to break the legal glass ceiling is an ironic line to take in a movie about someone who cared so much about gender equality.

Director Mimi Leder (asteroid-disaster movie *Deep Impact*, 1998; episodes of the excellent drama series *The Leftovers*, 2014 to 2017) knows how to deliver an emotional punch, but the screenplay's fear of digging into Ginsburg's fierce intelligence leaves Leder hamstrung.

Strong actors like Justin Theroux (whom Leder directed in *The Leftovers*) and Kathy Bates appear in supporting roles and ought to have been astringent counterpoints to the saccharine flavours, but their parts fail to grow much beyond the broadly comic.



# Singing about disharmony

## Veteran musicians Lunarin and Vanessa Fernandez return with three-track EPs



**ALTERNATIVE ROCK**  
**INTO THE ETHER**  
Lunarin  
Self-released  
★★★★☆



**R&B/SOUL**  
**SOULFUL GHOSTS**  
Soulful Ghosts  
Ownself Records  
★★★★☆

**Eddino Abdul Hadi**

Breaking a six-year silence, home-grown rock trio Lunarin returns with a fresh new batch of songs to mirror socio-political events that have taken place in their absence.

The title of the three-track EP, *Into The Ether*, and the cosmic cover art might suggest science fiction and mythology, but make no mistake, the songs are rooted in real-world disharmony and discord.

Opening track *Rage*, a fierce diatribe against “imbeciles”, an increas-

ingly polarising world and the mind-numbing rat race, is a groovy metal banger.

Singer and bass player Linda Ong’s low, ethereal voice lulls you into a false sense of security. By the time you realise the venom in her words (*Desecrate these idols/Ob-literate the silence/Feel my rage*), it is too late and you are already swept along by Ho Kah Wye’s fat, duntuned guitar riffs that slither around Loo Eng Teck’s tight and driving beats.

Bruises tackles the unease surrounding celebrity deaths and suicides. “If we are made from stars, do star dust turn into ashes?” Ong questions amid shifting tempos and odd-time signatures while *The Flood* envelopes you in its eerie, icy embrace.

The veteran band, first formed in 1995 under the name *Fuzzbox*, might sound like hardened cynics. Yet, they are also donating proceeds from the EP’s launch gig at the Esplanade Annexe Studio on Saturday to Home, a charity for migrant workers.

Like Lunarin, singer, songwriter and home-grown scene activist Vanessa Fernandez has been singing and making music since the 1990s.

Her new release is also a three-track EP, made with Australian guitarist/producer Nic Robertson under the moniker *Soulful Ghosts*.

Fernandez has always shown a flair for finding the right musical collaborators, whether it is with hip-hop outfit *Urban Xchange* back in the early 2000s or with electronic act *Octover* in recent years, and her latest electronic-tinged R&B project is no exception.

She exercises her full singing capabilities in *Told You So*, a stirring kiss-off to a former lover and the sensual *I Want You*, effortlessly switching from breathy crooning to high falsettos as Robertson’s guitars and beats skitter and slide in the background.

*Control* swaggers with its deftly plucked guitars and tension-building choruses. “Too many people trying to tell me how to breathe/I can’t be what I wanna,” Fernandez laments in a voice so lush that you want to help her unleash her shackles.

And while the debut EP’s short run time feels like a sneak preview, the luscious chemistry between her singing and the production is palpable and you cannot help but surrender to the duo’s charm.

dinohadi@sph.com.sg



Home-grown rock trio Lunarin, comprising (from far left) Linda Ong, Ho Kah Wye and Loo Eng Teck, have a fresh batch of songs to mirror socio-political events. PHOTO: LUNARIN



In her new album, singer-songwriter Tanya Chua displays a different mood from her previous dark electronic record *Aphasia* (2015). PHOTO: UNIVERSAL MUSIC

## Tanya Chua lightens up



**POP**  
**KISSES FOR THE WORLD**  
Tanya Chua  
Universal Music  
Taiwan  
★★★★☆

**Boon Chan**

Home-grown singer-songwriter Tanya Chua is ready to lighten up after the dark electronic record *Aphasia* (2015), which is about the difficulty of communication.

The change of mood can be seen from the album cover here: a goofy picture of her puckering up as she prepares to send out *Kisses For The World*.

She has not broken away from electronica, but the effect here is brighter and more buoyant.

The breezy *Li Xian Di Tu* (*Offline Map*) is a perfect number to drive along to as she urges one to “step lower on the accelerator” and “kiss me a little harder”.

Opening track *Wu Bu* (*Dance Steps*) sounds deceptively upbeat though the lyrics speak of a relationship that is past: “If you move forward, I’ll take a step back/Just one glance and you can decode/I miss

our harmonious dance together”.

While all the songs are in Mandarin, there is a little French flair in the titles of the tracks *Deja Vu* and *A La Folie*, which literally means “to madness”.

*A La Folie*, composed by Chua and with lyrics by Taiwanese band *sodagreen*’s Wu Ching-feng, centres on an intense relationship: “What I hear, think, say, all has your smell/I sit, wait, stand, walk, all with illusions of you”.

Does this refer to her short-lived romance with a French pastry chef two years ago?

Elsewhere, there is a sense of moving on and picking up the pieces in *Yi Shu* (*The Will*) and *Yuan Liang* (*Forgive*).

On lead single *The Will* – which supposedly deals with her depression – she also seems to be considering her identity and legacy as a musician. “The tears I’ve shed, the heart-break I can’t hide/Turn them into songs to comfort/I close my eyes and sing, thankful this life has not been in vain.”

As for the charge that Chua plagiarised American pop star Taylor Swift and country duo *The Civil Wars*’ *Safe & Sound* for the song *Ban Tu* (*Halfway*), it is one that, for me, does not stick.

## Heartfelt songs from Irish rising star



**INDIE FOLK/ROCK**  
**DERMOT KENNEDY**  
Dermot Kennedy  
Riggins Recording  
★★★★☆

**Yeow Kai Chai**

Question first: What do household names such as U2, Sinead O’Connor and The Cranberries as well as more esoteric acts such as Villagers, Gavin Friday, James Vincent McMorrow and Fionn Regan share in common?

They are all from Ireland, boasting a modest population of about 4.8 million (smaller than Singapore’s 5.6 million).

Here’s another rising star from the Emerald Isle touted to make it big this year: Dermot Kennedy who has clocked up 300 million streams so far on Spotify.

This 25-year-old Dubliner has paid his dues, busking in Grafton Street (where his heroes Damien Rice and Glen Hansard used to ply their trade) and putting his songs up on Spotify before one track *Boston* was handpicked by American pop princess Taylor Swift for her playlist in 2017 – and the rest is history.

That track is among 12 songs individually released earlier, as singles or part of EPs, and now put together as an introductory folio for newcomers before he unleashes his debut album on Interscope this year.

The song is a heartfelt, stripped-down ode to his days busking in the streets of Boston, near the Public Garden, Harvard Square and Newbury Street. “Take me back to places I feel loved in/Maybe failing that, take me back to Boston,” he sings over gentle strums and a sprinkling of subtle electronic keys. “Pretty intimate so far, so I lit a holy fire,” he adds.

So far, so typically folkish – that is until you hear him coming into his own on more arresting anthems where his roots are melded with tougher, rockier inspiration.

All *My Friends* is a love letter to the early days and friendships forged, even as he realises that he has to leave home to pursue his dream. His distinct Gaelic lilt comes to the fore as it rasps and frays over the mix of gentle riffs and electronic thumps. “Looking up lately/The moon doesn’t chase me no more/Before it was child-like/Lost in the soft light,” he bids

farewell to innocence.

The spirit of hard work and keeping it real also infuses *Young And Free*. “We were young, we were free,” he hollers, laying on each word and switching between vulnerability and bold, heart-on-sleeve pronouncement, not unlike American indie folk group *Bon Iver*’s Justin Vernon on the cusp of a technological makeover.

Vernon’s influence is espied on *For Island Fires And Family*, particularly in the way the surreal layering of wordless vocals, natural and digital, comes at the end of the first verse. “Roamin’ lonely over sea air/How it must feel to be a bird/London, Paris, underneath/And I’ll wait on my own,” Kennedy sings, before launching into a series of airborne “oohs”.

When he just sits at the piano and bares his soul on the break-up dirge *An Evening I Will Not Forget*, he is nonpareil.

How he builds up the torrent of emotions – love, hurt, denial, frustration, acceptance – is an admirable feat. “Confessions should be better planned/Alone that night, I’m surely damned,” he spits out and you can almost hear a pin drop.

## Debut album with inimitable style



**ELECTRO HOUSE**  
**DIFFERENT WORLD**  
Alan Walker  
Sony Music  
★★★★☆

**Anjali Raguraman**

Norwegian DJ-producer Alan Walker’s debut album feels like a long time coming since his break-out single *Faded* put him on the map back in 2015.

But the wait has been worth it. The 15-track *Different World* is tight and well thought out – the new songs take up the first half, with the latter portion comprising

the hit songs he has already amassed.

As a whole, it stays true to the 21-year-old’s style of cinematic, vocals-driven EDM (electronic dance music) – the kind that lends itself to singalongs at music festivals.

Long-time fans will be pleased to find chart-topping hits like *All Falls Down* with Noah Cyrus, *Darkside* with Au/Ra and *Alone* with Noonie Bao here.

The newer singles are equally chart-worthy and sound like potential hits. But it also feels like Walker has played it safe by sticking to what he is familiar with.

At first listen, *Lonely*, a collaboration with superstar American DJ

Steve Aoki, feels like a harder, Aoki-style track. But Walker’s touch is undeniable, reining it in and turning it into an approachable, synth melody-laced number.

On the title track *Different World* with fellow Norwegian producer K-391 and upcoming Chinese producer Corsak, his inimitable style comes through once again.

The standout *Diamond Heart*, featuring soaring vocals by Swedish singer Sophia Somajo, who sounds just like Australian vocal powerhouse Sia, is the only track that seems to have any real depth and grit.

Still, it is hard to fault Walker for sticking to a winning formula given that this is his first album.

## Great stories told in melodies



**JAZZ**  
**UNA NOCHE CON RUBEN BLADES**  
Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis, featuring Ruben Blades  
Blue Engine Records  
★★★★☆

**Ong Sor Fern**

Before jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and the swing band he founded hit town in March, sample their tight musicianship and wall of sound texture in this recent release.

This album was recorded live at the Lincoln Center’s Frederick P. Rose Hall on Nov 15, 2014. The programming of Panamanian singer and activist Ruben Blades dovetails nicely with Marsalis’ own politically aware aesthetic.

Blades’ liquid tenor voice soars and swoops through a programme that mixes standards from the American songbook with classics from his own charged repertoire.

The combination proves surprisingly companionable, mainly because each party is mindful of the genres they are exploring and each brings his own musical accomplishments to bear on unfamiliar territory.

Blades’ gift as a singer lies in his narrative ability and emotional clarity. Backed by the orchestra’s sturdy musicians, he tells great stories in beautifully melodic lines.

Listen to Pedro Navaja, his 1978 hit inspired by the song *Mack The Knife*, about a thief trying to steal from a prostitute. It is Blades’ long lyrical lines that keep the momentum going, building tension as the song unfurls with quotes from Bertolt Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera* and Leonard Bernstein’s *America*.

A great musical exchange that you will want to put on repeat mode.

### MusicCharts

#### APPLE MUSIC

1. (1) *Thank U, Next* – Ariana Grande
2. (3) *A Kind Of Sorrow* – A-lin
3. (2) *Everything I Need* – Skylar Grey
4. (5) *Solo* – Jennie
5. (4) *Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse)* – Post Malone and Swae Lee
6. (6) *Without Me* – Halsey
7. (8) *Happier* – Marshmello & Bastille
8. (7) *Ddu-Du Ddu-Du* – Blackpink
9. (-) *Love Someone* – Lukas Graham
10. (-) *Sweet But Psycho* – Ava Max

• For the week of Jan 9 in Singapore

#### SPOTIFY SINGAPORE

1. (1) *Thank U, Next* – Ariana Grande
2. (2) *Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse)* – Post Malone and Swae Lee
3. (3) *A Kind Of Sorrow* – A-lin
4. (4) *Without Me* – Halsey
5. (5) *Solo* – Jennie
6. (7) *Sweet But Psycho* – Ava Max
7. (6) *Everything I Need* – Skylar Grey
8. (-) *Close To Me* – Ellie Goulding, Diplo and Swae Lee
9. (8) *Kiss And Make Up* – Dua Lipa and Blackpink
10. (-) *Wow.* – Post Malone

• For the week ending Jan 9

#### BILLBOARD

1. (2) *Without Me* – Halsey
2. (1) *Thank U, Next* – Ariana Grande
3. (5) *Sunflower (Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse)* – Post Malone and Swae Lee
4. (4) *Sicko Mode* – Travis Scott
5. (6) *High Hopes* – Panic! At The Disco
6. (7) *Happier* – Marshmello and Bastille
7. (14) *Girls Like You* – Maroon 5 featuring Cardi B
8. (12) *Drip Too Hard* – Lil Baby & Gunna
9. (15) *Zeze* – Kodak Black Featuring Travis Scott & Offset
10. (23) *Better Now* – Post Malone

• For the week of Jan 12

#### HIT FM

1. (1) *The Will* – Tanya Chua
2. (15) *Ugly Beauty* – Jolin Tsai
3. (6) *Alibi* – Alibi
4. (4) *Ah Woo* – Neko Highway
5. (-) *Resurgence* – JJ Lin
6. (-) *Monster* – Uniq
7. (5) *The Time Keeper* – Fuying & Sam
8. (3) *Dwell On The Past* – Li Ronghao
9. (13) *Core* – Sandy Lam
10. (11) *Imperfect Rainbow* – Cheer Chen

• For the week ending Dec 30



Italian artist Dosso Dossi's oil on canvas, *Allegory Of Fortune* (1530, right), is featured in The Renaissance Nude exhibition. PHOTO: THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM



# Shedding light on history of nudes

## The Renaissance Nude at Los Angeles' Getty Museum tracks how the naked body became a subject for art

LOS ANGELES • Here is the bare truth – good exhibitions complicate things without confusing them.

By that standard, the Getty Museum's *The Renaissance Nude* is a very fine show, adding layers of complexity to the general understanding of how the naked body became a subject for art in the 15th century.

It focuses not just on the heroic nude in Italy, the idealised body inspired by the rediscovery of ancient art, but also on the nude throughout Europe.

It surveys the various forces in play at the time – including changes in religious practice and new, more rigorous powers of observation – and how those forces created an appetite for depiction of the unclothed body.

And it acknowledges the obvious – that desire was always a part of the pleasure of the naked figure, no mat-

ter how pious, allegorical or mythological the supporting narrative.

The exhibition, curated by Mr Thomas Krens, looks at a period of about 120 years, beginning in 1400, and includes more than 100 works, many of them significant loans from major European collections.

It features works by Giovanni Bellini, Donatello, Albrecht Durer, Jan Gossaert, Antonio Pollaiuolo and Titian, and includes paintings, sculptures, drawings (including anatomical renderings by Leonardo da Vinci) and prints.

It also places a particular focus on French artists, who produced a kind of hidden history of the nude in illustrated devotional books, images meant for private contemplation and images that are not always incorporated into the broader understanding of the nude during this period.

Different understandings of propriety influenced the development of the nude form as well.

In Italy, in the early 15th century, images of the naked St Sebastian predominated, in part because it was not appropriate to draw naked women from life.

A drawing of female figures by Pisanello, probably made in the

mid-1420s to the early 1430s, may or may not have been drawn from actual observation of female models, but if it was, then it was one of the earliest such drawings.

Purely artistic forces were also driving the new imagery.

The impulse to virtuosity, to elaborate and refine and outdo earlier work, might explain the slightly surreal *Battle Of The Nudes*, by Pollaiuolo, an engraving that was influential throughout Europe.

It shows a brutal battle among 10 naked men, who wield swords, arrows, axes and daggers.

The context for this bloodlust is not stated or obvious, but the artist's motivation might simply have been to show his skill at different poses of the male figure.

Observation may have driven some of the development of the nude, but observation also led to idealisation and, for many artists, sketching the naked body was not about capturing a discreet moment in the life of a living figure, but about perfecting the form of the figure beyond the particulars of any one body.

Artists such as Durer sought to schematise the body, identify its pro-

portions and determine the ideal relation of its parts to one another.

Artists such as Michelangelo pushed that idealisation to create what still reads today as superhuman bodies, perfect beyond reason.

In some ways, that brought the Renaissance full circle, from its initial argument with the formulaic mediaeval depiction of the body to yet another formula – the over-buffed, supposedly "classical" nude one sees in the figures of the Sistine Chapel (an image of which concludes the Getty show).

Among the more gratifying images in the exhibition are those that suggest the variety of body types that were considered beautiful.

An image by Durer of a woman praying, seen from behind, shows a more full and fleshy ideal of beauty, while several of the early St Sebastians depict male beauty as androgynous and even feminine.

A powerful drawing by Hans Baldung shows *The Ecstatic Christ*, who has the powerful body of a classical figure, but is seen twisting on the ground, with the wounds of the crucifixion clearly visible on one hand.

The Baldung drawing reminds the viewer of something that becomes a powerful leitmotif of the exhibition – that many of these works insist on operating in wildly different, even self-contradictory ways.

In fact, this exhibition leaves one with the sense that the current moment is the puritanical and nervous one and that people still have a long way to go before fully acknowledging how wonderfully voluptuous the past has always been.

WASHINGTON POST

• The Renaissance Nude is on at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles until Jan 27.

## Nudist eatery in Paris to close

PARIS • The owners first wanted customers to shed their clothes.

Now, they want to shed losses, with the first nudist restaurant in the French capital forced to close because it cannot put enough bums on seats.

O'Naturel will draw the curtains on nude fine dining in Paris next month after a little over a year, despite rave reviews from diners who feasted on oysters, snails, foie gras and asparagus.

But to avoid financial embarrassment, twins Mike and Stephane Saada said they intended to wrap up the business.

"It is now or never," they urged the curious "wanting to experience a last nude dinner in Paris" before they bring down the shutters on Feb 16.

"We are counting on you to support us," they wrote on Facebook.

"We thank everyone for taking part in this adventure. We will remember only the good moments and the great people we met."

The restaurant in the east of Paris opened amid a blaze of publicity in November 2017.

Clothes must be left in a cloakroom along with mobile phones, to prevent people from sneaking a photo of other customers.

The diners are then provided with slippers, although women – who make up 40 per cent of the clientele, according to the managers – may keep their heels on.

O'Naturel – a play on the French phrase for naked – was seen as a sign that naturism was becoming ever more mainstream in a country which is the world's top destination for nude tourism.

Four million people holiday "au naturel" in France every year.

With a new summer nudist zone in Paris' biggest park, naked stand-up comedy nights and museum visits, activists did not hide their ambition to make further inroads for naturists.

Unlike the nude London restaurant The Bunyadi, which opened briefly in 2016, the Saada brothers keep their clothes on as they serve customers.

"Our role is to put people at ease," said Stephane, who insisted French law demanded that they stay dressed.

"As soon as customers enter the dining room, we accompany them to their table and we reassure them that it's not like the whole room is looking at them," he told Agence France-Presse after it opened.

The restaurant's black chair covers are discreetly changed between sittings, with diners shielded from prying eyes outside by a heavy white curtain.

While news of the closure sent a chill through the French naturist world, campaigner Cedric Amato said the restaurant was ahead of its time.

"It may have been a little early" for an all-year-round nudist establishment in Paris, he noted.

"I ate there many times and it was very good", but the fact that it was in a residential area and did not have a terrace for good weather counted against it, he added.

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# Lunch, and it's on the company

The practice of providing food at the American workplace is almost obligatory, with businesses pulling out the stops to offer variety

NEW YORK • Everyone who works at Ben & Jerry's headquarters in Burlington, Vermont, is entitled to three free pints of ice cream for each day of work.

At the American Enterprise Institute, a think-tank in Washington, employees are treated daily to an elaborate buffet with choices such as prime rib and crabcakes.

At the Perkins Eastman architecture firm, staff can enjoy all manner of free snacks – as long as they are orange, the colour of its logo.

Free food has been a presence in the American workplace since the 1990s, when Bloomberg and tech start-ups like Google began to put out snacks in hopes of making staff happier or healthier, more productive and less likely to stray far from the task at hand.

Today, the practice is almost obligatory, as businesses go to great lengths to provide food without charge or at a sharp discount.

The offerings have grown in size, scope and specificity.

Dating app Hinge uses edible perks strategically: Employees in its New York office get US\$200 (\$270) a month to spend on dates, which often involve food.

There are workplaces where the food gifts have a competitive feel. Zappos, an online shoe retailer, holds periodic eating contests in its main plaza in Las Vegas. More than 300 employees show up to cheer.

Fidelity, a financial services company, dangles food as an incentive. The items are not free, but can come with a significant price break, determined by their perceived healthfulness. A grilled Buffalo chicken wrap might be half the price of the breaded and fried version.

Many food businesses offer employees only their own products.

Ms Rachel Drori, founder of subscription food-delivery company Daily Harvest, said filling the office refrigerators with free Daily Harvest smoothies and soups is a way to gauge the popularity of new items.

"We just launched a kelp pad thai and, yesterday, we didn't have enough for everybody," she noted.

LinkedIn, which does not charge for food even in its cafeterias, also provides several halal-meat options to cater to Muslim employees at its campus in Sunnyvale, California.



At Italian designer Brunello Cucinelli's headquarters in Solomeo, Italy, employees tuck into a multi-course lunch (above) for a nominal fee. PHOTOS: NYTIMES

"It's one of the reasons I have been at LinkedIn for four years," said Mr Omar Al-Ghwairi, a senior technical services manager.

Some company food policies have drawn mixed reviews. In July, a media uproar ensued after shared-workspace company WeWork said it would no longer serve meat at its offices and events.

A similar policy proved untenable at Google. After it tried to establish meatless Mondays at its cafeterias in 2010, employees rebelled by tossing out silverware and holding protest barbecues.

At the companies that give freebies, there are countless challenges for the people charged with producing them. Corporate kitchens also have to deal with dietary restrictions.

But designer Brunello Cucinelli is not fazed. He has been feeding his employees in Italy for a nominal fee (currently €3.20 or S\$5) since he

founded his label in 1978.

At the company's hill-top headquarters in the ancient hamlet of Solomeo, Italy, the roughly 1,000 employees enjoy a multi-course lunch that might include pasta with tomatoes and basil, and bread topped with fresh mozzarella.

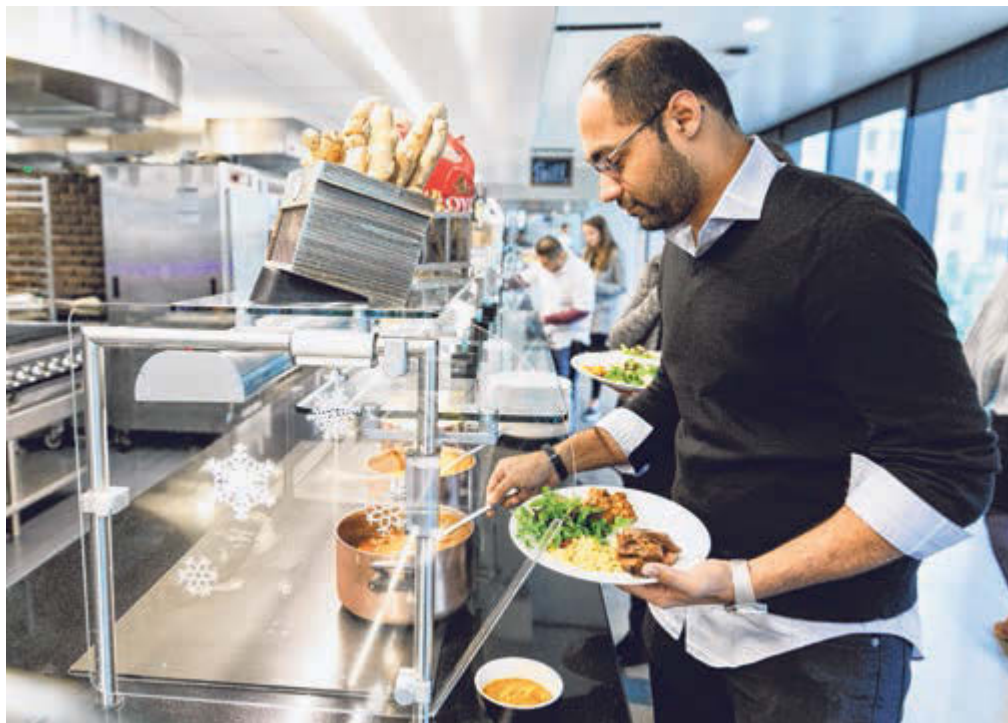
They sit at long tables in a courtyard with high ceilings and sweeping vistas of the city.

By taking time for a midday meal, "you can better focus your thoughts and your life", Cucinelli said. "It makes people more productive."

He recently visited the cafeteria at Apple's headquarters in Cupertino, California.

"It was a very nice experience," he said, from the design of the wooden tables to the freshness of the sushi.

But there was one big difference from his lunches in Italy. Most of the Apple employees were on their phones. NYTIMES



LinkedIn, which does not charge for food even in its cafeterias, also provides several halal-meat options to cater to Muslim employees at its campus in Sunnyvale, California.

## Love in 200 words

This Valentine's Day, The Straits Times invites you to tell us a love story in miniature

Send us a story about love – true, imagined, funny, sad, yours, anybody's – in 200 words, 200 being the magic number this Bicentennial year. We will publish the best entries on Feb 10.

- All entries must be 200 words or fewer.
- The Straits Times reserves the right to curate, edit and publish the entries at its discretion.
- Entries should not contain profanity or graphic language.

Send your entry to [stlife@sph.com.sg](mailto:stlife@sph.com.sg) by Jan 31 with "LOVE STORY" in the e-mail subject line, along with the following details:

- Your full name as in your NRIC
- Your date of birth
- Your mobile phone number
- Your e-mail address



## Toymaker in suit with Louis Vuitton over poop-shaped purse



Luxury fashion label Louis Vuitton had claimed that the design of Poopsie Poey Puitton (left) is a trademark infringement because its design marks and name are similar to those of its handbags.

NEW YORK • Does Poopsie Poey Puitton sound like a Louis Vuitton item?

American toymaker MGA Entertainment thinks not and has preemptively sued the French label's parent company, luxury stable LVMH, to ensure it can keep making Poopsie Poey Puitton, its slime-filled plastic purse.

According to documents filed last week in Los Angeles federal court, Louis Vuitton had claimed that the toy's design is a trademark infringement because its design marks and name are similar to those of its handbags.

MGA argues not only is the toy obviously not a Louis Vuitton knock-off, but it is also meant to slime the lifestyle of the ultra-wealthy consumers who ascribe to the brand and thus should be protected as parody.

"Louis Vuitton and the LV marks are associated with expensive, high-end, luxury products that evoke wealth and celebrity," MGA's

lawyer said in the complaint.

"The use of the Poey name and product in association with a product line of 'magical unicorn poop' is intended to criticise or comment upon the rich and famous, and the Louis Vuitton name, the LV marks, and on their conspicuous consumption."

The toy is part of a line of Poopsie Surprise products, which include ingredients to make sparkly, magical "unicorn poop".

It was one of MGA's most successful new toys last year, according to court documents.

In its complaint, MGA delivered a detailed analysis of why no reasonable consumer would ever confuse Poey Puitton for a Louis Vuitton product.

"Louis Vuitton handbags are not poop-shaped, are not made out of hardened plastic and do not depict three-dimensional cartoonish facial features such as elongated eyelashes and pouted lips.

"Louis Vuitton handbags are typi-

cally sold at price points significantly higher than that of the Poey Product's suggested retail price of US\$59.99 (\$\$81.40)."

The complaint also argued that Louis Vuitton "has a history of not respecting parody rights in the US and filing vexatious lawsuits against such protected parody", pointing to the brand's 2014 lawsuit against a small Los Angeles handbag company that printed high-end handbag designs on canvas tote bags.

The complaint also mentioned Louis Vuitton's lawsuit against Haute Diggity Dog, a pet toy company, over a line of Chewy Vuitton chew toys shaped like purses and high heels.

Louis Vuitton lost both cases. MGA is no stranger to lawsuits either and is still tangled in a multi-year slog with Mattel over the designs of its Bratz dolls.

Based in Van Nuys, California, MGA is known for toys such as L.O.L. Surprise! and Little Tikes products. WASHINGTON POST



Comics

BABY BLUES



GARFIELD



Free to air

CHANNEL 5

**AM**  
6.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 15 (HD) (PG) (V)  
6.45 Just For Laughs Gags 17 (HD) (V)  
7.00 First Look Asia (Simulcast From CNA) (CA)  
9.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (PG) (IE)  
10.00 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (V)  
10.30 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)  
11.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)  
**PM**  
12.00 Martha Bakes 5 (HD) (IE)  
12.30 Secret Meat Business (IE)  
1.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (HD) (CC) (V)  
1.30 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)  
2.00 Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 3 (SC)  
2.30 On The Red Dot – Old Enough! (HD) (CC) (CA)  
3.00 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (IE)  
4.00 Meet The MP (HD) (PG) (SC)  
4.30 America's Got Talent 12 (HD) (PG) (V)  
5.30 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (V)  
6.30 Divided (US) (HD) (PG) (V)  
7.00 Wheel Of Fortune 36 (HD) (CC) (V)  
7.30 America's Got Talent: The Champions (V)  
8.30 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)  
9.00 News 5 (HD)  
9.30 Talking Point 2018 (HD) (CA)  
10.00 The Brave (HD) (PG13) (D)  
11.00 NCIS 14 (HD) (PG13) (CC) (D)  
**AM**  
12.00 Kin (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)  
12.30 Whacked Out Sports (HD) (PG) (V)  
12.50 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16 (PG) (V)  
1.40 This Is Us (HD) (PG) (D)  
2.30 Grimm 5 (HD) (PG) (D)  
3.20 Everyday Gourmet 3 (HD) (IE)  
3.50 Martha Bakes 5 (HD) (IE)  
4.15 Secret Meat Business (IE)  
4.40 The \$100,000 Pyramid (HD) (V)  
5.10 The Dr Oz Show 10 (HD) (IE)

CHANNEL 8

**AM**  
6.00 Golden Age Talentime (CC) (V)  
7.00 Sidewalk Scientist (IE)

7.30 Hello Singapore Highlights (HD) (News)  
8.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)  
9.00 Morning Express (HD) (News)  
9.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)  
10.00 Fruit, Veggies & Me 2 (CC) (IE)  
10.30 Night Market Life Aka Life (PG) (D)  
**PM**  
12.30 JML Home Shopping (Infomercial)  
1.00 News 8 At One (HD)  
1.30 118 (PG) (CC) (D)  
2.00 Little Counsellor (HD) (S)  
2.30 Your Hand In Mine (HD) (CC) (D)  
3.30 Classic Golden Melody 2018 (V)  
4.30 Taste Of Life (PG) (D)  
5.30 118 Reunion (PG) (CC) (D)  
6.30 Hello Singapore (HD) (CA)  
7.30 Jalan Jalan (PG) (CC) (D)  
8.00 Top 10 Singapore (CC) (IE)  
9.00 Heart To Heart (PG) (CC) (D)  
10.00 News Tonight (HD)  
10.30 Focus (CC) (CA)  
11.00 Princess Agents (PG) (D)

AM

12.00 The Princess Weiyoung (PG) (D)  
1.00 Chef Apprentice (V)  
2.00 Changing Fortunes (D)  
4.00 A Place Called Home (PG) (D)

CHANNEL U

**PM**  
3.00 Unique Towns (HD) (CC) (IE)  
4.00 The Food Detectives (IE)  
4.30 The Work Goes On (IE)  
5.00 Cheongdamdong Scandal (PG) (CC) (D)  
6.00 The Menu (PG) (CC) (D)  
7.00 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)  
9.00 World Food (CC) (IE)  
10.00 Brother's Keeper 2 (PG13) (CC) (D)  
11.00 News Tonight  
11.30 World Food (CC) (IE)  
**AM**  
12.30 You Are The Only One (PG) (CC) (D)  
2.30 Close

CNA

**AM**  
6.00 Singapore Tonight  
7.00 First Look Asia  
9.00 Asia Business First  
10.02 Real Deal

11.00 News Now  
**PM**  
1.02 Champions For Change  
2.00 News Now  
4.02 Real Deal  
5.00 News Now  
7.02 Champions For Change (CC)  
8.00 Primetime Asia  
9.02 Insight  
10.00 Singapore Tonight  
11.02 Champions For Change  
**AM**  
12.00 News Now  
12.30 Power List Asia 6  
1.02 Insight  
2.00 News Now  
2.30 The Successors 5  
3.02 Real Deal  
4.00 News Now  
4.30 Millionaire Minds  
5.02 Insight

VASANTHAM

**PM**  
3.00 Super Samayal 4 (IE)  
3.30 Azhagiya Snehithi 2 (IE)  
4.00 Sundaram Kudumbathinar (HD) (D)  
4.30 Enna Nadakuthu 6 (HD) (V)  
5.30 Motu Patlu 3 (S)  
6.00 Ishq Ka Rang Safed (PG) (D) (Hindi)  
7.00 Konjam Soru Konjam 2 (Cul)  
7.30 Mella Thiranthathu Kathavu 3 (PG) (CC) (D)  
8.00 Adukku Veetu Annasamy (HD) (CC) (D)  
8.30 Tamil Seithi (News)  
9.00 Kanavu Meipada 2 (CC) (IE)  
10.00 Kannum Kannum Kollaiyadithal (PG) (CC) (D)  
10.30 Bayam (PG) (CC) (D)  
11.00 Nyabagam Varuthae 3 (V)  
11.30 Tamil Seithi (News) (R)

AM

12.00 Close

OKTO

**AM**  
9.00 Messy Goes To Okido (HD) (P)  
9.30 Teddies (P)  
10.00 Doki (P)  
10.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)  
11.00 Dora The Explorer (HD) (P)  
11.30 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)

**PM**  
12.00 Bugsville (P)  
12.30 Teddies (P)  
1.00 Little Charmers (HD) (P)  
1.30 Messy Goes To Okido (HD) (P)  
2.00 Doki (P)  
2.30 Sesame Street (HD) (P)  
3.00 Dora The Explorer (HD) (P)  
3.30 Andy's Prehistoric Adventures (P)  
4.00 All Over The Workplace (S)  
4.30 Sherazade: The Untold Stories (S)  
5.00 Littlest Pet Shop (S)  
5.30 Grizzy & The Lemmings (S)  
6.00 The Lion Guard (S)  
6.30 Fableicious (HD) (S)  
7.00 My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic (HD) (S)  
7.30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (HD) (CC) (S)  
8.00 Star Wars Rebels (HD) (CC) (S)  
8.30 Inazuma Eleven (S)  
9.00 ITTF Men's World Cup 2018 (Sports)  
11.00 American Ninja Warrior 6 (HD) (PG) (Sports)  
**AM**  
12.00 Close

SURIA

**PM**  
4.00 Seindah Takdir Cinta (PG) (D)  
5.00 Hilang Kasih Di Sarajevo (CC) (D)  
6.00 Kisah Kita (HD) (S)  
6.30 Siapa Master? (HD) (IE)  
7.00 Teratai Kemboja (HD) (PG) (CC) (D)  
8.00 Berita (HD) (News)  
8.30 Jalan 7 (HD) (PG) (IE)  
9.30 Ti Amo, Sweetheart 100 Hari! (PG) (CC) (D)  
10.30 Alam Maya (PG) (CC) (D)  
11.30 Berita (HD) (News) (R)

AM

12.00 Close

C: Children; CA: Current Affairs; CC: Closed Captions; Cul: Culture; D: Drama; IE: Info-Ed; M: Movies; P: Preschool; PG: Parental Guidance; R: Repeat; S: Schoolkids; SC: Sitcom; V: Variety

Programme schedules correct at time of printing. Telecast details from Mediacorp, StarHub and Singtel TV. For pay TV updates, go to [www.starhub.com/tv](http://www.starhub.com/tv) or [www.singtelv.com.sg](http://www.singtelv.com.sg)

StarHub TV

HISTORY (CHANNEL 401)

**AM**  
7.05 Storage Wars 11  
7.35 Storage Wars: Texas 6  
8.00 Storage Wars 10  
8.30 Pawn Stars 19  
9.30 The Pickers 11  
10.25 Hunting Hitler 2  
11.20 Breaking Mysterious  
**PM**  
1.10 Ancient Aliens 11  
3.00 Pawn Stars 18  
3.30 Pawn Stars 19  
4.25 Ancient Aliens 11  
6.15 The Pickers 11  
7.10 Pawn Stars 19  
8.05 Storage Wars: Texas 6  
8.30 Storage Wars 10  
9.00 Ancient Aliens 11  
9.55 History Drama: Vikings 5  
10.50 The Curse Of Oak Island 5  
11.45 Breaking Mysterious

LIFETIME (CHANNEL 514)

**AM**  
7.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown  
8.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16  
9.00 Scraps  
10.00 Project Runway: Fashion Startup  
11.00 Zoo 3  
**PM**  
12.00 Dance Moms 6  
1.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16  
2.00 House Of Darkness: New Blood  
3.35 Married At First Sight Australia 4  
5.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16  
6.00 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown  
7.00 This Time Next Year  
8.00 Born This Way 2  
9.00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show 16  
10.00 Iris Johansen's The Killing Game  
11.35 Man Vs Child: Chef Showdown

HBO (CHANNEL 601)

**AM**  
7.45 Mr Woodcock (NC16)  
9.10 The Matrix  
11.25 Molly's Game (NC16)  
**PM**  
1.40 It's Complicated (NC16)  
3.35 Leatherheads  
5.30 Win A Date With Tad Hamilton!  
7.05 Ocean's Eleven  
9.00 Geostorm (NC16)  
10.50 Live By Night (NC16)

CINEMAX (CHANNEL 611)

**AM**  
8.50 The Layover (NC16)  
10.15 John Carpenter's Escape From L.A.  
11.55 Vendetta: A True Story  
**PM**  
1.50 We're No Angels (1989)  
3.35 Pu-239  
5.10 Pootie Tang  
6.30 The LXD: Rise Of The Drifts  
7.55 Inside Man  
10.00 The Art Of War  
11.55 Strike Back 2 (M18)

HUB E CITY (CHANNEL 825)

**AM**  
7.00 Tomorrow With You (HD)  
8.15 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)  
9.15 Dowry (HD)  
10.15 Sound Of My Dream 3 (HD)  
**PM**  
12.15 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)  
1.30 Tomorrow With You (HD)  
2.45 Back To Youth (HD)  
4.15 The Way To Wellness (HD)  
4.45 The Gentlemen Of Wolgyesu Tailor Shop (HD)  
6.00 Dowry (HD)  
7.00 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)  
8.00 Super Boys 2 (HD)  
9.30 Fun Abroad (HD)  
10.00 The King's Woman (HD)  
11.00 Hot Door Night 15 (HD)

HUB SPORTS 1 (CHANNEL 201)

**AM**  
9.30 Snooker: The Masters Finals 2018 Highlights – Quarter-finals  
**PM**  
1.00 UCI BMX Supercross World Cup Rounds 3 And 4 Highlights: Papendal  
2.00 BMX Supercross 2017: Lane 1  
2.30 Tennis: ATP 1000 Nitto ATP Finals 2018 Day 4 Session 1  
4.30 Tennis: ATP 1000 Nitto ATP Finals 2018 Day 4 Session 2  
7.30 BMX: 2018 Living The Ride  
8.00 Extreme Sports: World Surf League 2018: Women's Hawaiian Pro Highlights  
9.00 Tennis: Deuce 2018  
9.30 Tennis: ATP World Tour Uncovered 2019  
10.00 Mountain Bike: Enduro World Series 2018: Petzen – Jamnica, Austria/Slovenia Highlights  
10.30 BMX Supercross 2017: Lane 1  
11.00 UCI BMX Supercross World Cup Rounds 3 And 4 Highlights: Papendal

HUB SPORTS 2 (CHANNEL 202)

**AM**  
6.00 Wrestling: WWE This Week (PG)  
6.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV  
7.00 National Basketball League Round 12: Illawarra Hawks Vs Sydney Kings  
9.00 Asean Basketball League 2018/19: Macau Black Bears Vs Formosa Dreamers (Same Day Delayed)  
11.00 Magazine: Trans World Sport 2019  
**PM**  
12.00 Magazine: Omnisport.TV  
12.30 Asean Basketball League 2018/19: Westports Malaysia Dragons Vs San Miguel Alab Pilipinas (Same Day Delayed)  
2.30 Football: EFL Carabao Cup 2018 Semi-finals 2 Leg 1 Tottenham Hotspur Vs Chelsea  
4.30 Wrestling: WWE Raw (PG13)  
7.00 Fiba World Basketball 2019  
7.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV  
8.00 Wrestling: WWE Smackdown (PG)  
9.30 Football: EFL Carabao Cup 2018 Semi-finals 2 Leg 1 Tottenham Hotspur Vs Chelsea  
11.30 Magazine: Omnisport.TV

Singtel TV

CARTOON NETWORK (CHANNEL 226)

**AM**  
6.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches  
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show  
8.00 Teen Titans Go!  
9.00 Grizzy And The Lemmings  
9.30 The Tom And Jerry Show  
10.00 We Bare Bears  
10.30 Supernobobs  
11.00 The Powerpuff Girls  
**PM**  
12.00 Teen Titans Go!  
1.00 We Bare Bears  
2.00 Ninjago: Masters Of Spinjitzu  
2.30 The Powerpuff Girls  
3.00 Running Man Animation  
3.30 Craig Of The Creek  
4.00 We Bare Bears  
4.30 The Powerpuff Girls  
5.00 Teen Titans Go!  
5.30 Ben 10  
6.00 Oggy & The Cockroaches  
6.30 Running Man Animation  
7.00 The Tom And Jerry Show  
7.30 Grizzy And The Lemmings  
8.00 We Bare Bears  
9.00 The Powerpuff Girls  
10.00 Regular Show  
10.30 Steven Universe  
11.00 Clarence  
11.30 Adventure Time

AXN (HD) (CHANNEL 304)

**AM**  
6.00 Valor  
6.45 The Amazing Race 30  
7.35 The Blacklist 5  
8.25 MacGyver  
9.15 American Ninja Warrior 7  
10.05 Valor  
10.55 Caught On Camera With Nick Cannon 2  
11.45 The Amazing Race 30  
**PM**  
12.35 MacGyver  
1.25 Quantico 2  
2.15 American Ninja Warrior 7  
3.05 Valor  
3.55 The Blacklist 5  
4.45 MacGyver  
5.35 American Ninja Warrior 7  
6.25 Seal Team 2  
7.15 The Amazing Race 30  
8.05 Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders  
9.45 MacGyver 3  
10.35 White House Down

WARNER TV (HD) (CHANNEL 306)

**AM**  
6.00 iZombie 4  
6.50 Person Of Interest 4  
7.40 Lethal Weapon 2  
8.30 Supergirl 2  
9.20 The Flash 3  
10.10 iZombie 4  
10.55 Top 20 Funniest 2  
11.40 Lethal Weapon 3

**PM**  
12.30 The Legend Of Tarzan  
2.30 iZombie 4  
3.20 Top 20 Funniest 2  
4.05 The Flash 3  
4.55 Supergirl 2  
5.40 Person Of Interest 4  
6.30 The Flash 3  
7.20 Friends 7  
8.10 Top 20 Funniest 2  
9.00 Unknown  
11.00 Friends 7  
11.50 The Big Bang Theory 12

COMEDY CENTRAL ASIA (HD) (CHANNEL 324)

**AM**  
6.00 At Midnight With Chris Hardwick 2  
6.25 The Daily Show 24  
6.50 Just For Laughs Gags 10  
7.15 Kids Do The Craziest Things  
7.40 Mr Bean  
8.10 Your Face Or Mine 4  
8.35 Most Ridiculous  
9.00 Billy On The Street 5  
9.25 Takeshi's Castle 4  
9.50 Mr Bean  
10.20 Most Ridiculous 2  
10.45 Almost Royals 2  
11.15 Saturday Night Live 43  
**PM**  
12.05 The Daily Show 24  
12.30 The Goldbergs 5  
1.20 Hot In Cleveland 5  
2.10 Comedy Central Roast Of Bruce Willis  
3.45 Takeshi's Castle 4  
4.10 Most Ridiculous Asia With Jason Leong  
4.35 Almost Royals 2  
5.00 The Goldbergs 5  
5.50 Hot In Cleveland 5  
6.40 Above Average Presents  
6.45 Your Face Or Mine 4  
7.10 Most Ridiculous  
7.35 Billy On The Street 5  
8.00 Takeshi's Castle 4  
8.25 The Goldbergs 5  
9.15 Hot In Cleveland 5  
10.10 The Comedy Jam  
11.00 Caraoke Showdown  
11.25 The Daily Show 24  
11.55 Above Average Presents

JIA LE (HD) (CHANNEL 502)

**AM**  
6.00 Chronicle Of Love  
7.00 First Love  
8.00 Entrepreneurial Age  
9.00 Eagle And Youngster  
10.00 100% Wife  
**PM**  
12.10 First Love  
1.00 In The Name Of Love  
2.00 100% Wife  
4.10 Entrepreneurial Age  
5.00 First Love  
6.00 In The Name Of Love  
7.00 100% Wife  
9.10 First Love  
10.00 Entrepreneurial Age  
11.00 Eagle And Youngster

TheStarsSay

**Aries** (March 21 - April 19)  
Your dreams are telling, so try to remember them. Keep paper by your bed so you can take notes.

**Taurus** (April 20 - May 20)  
You and your people are seemingly of one mind, which should make planning easy.

**Gemini** (May 21 - June 20)  
It is a great day to indulge your creative side, so make sure you keep the ideas flowing.

**Cancer** (June 21 - July 22)  
You feel more connected to your people than usual. Let at least one of them know you are there with him.

**Leo** (July 23 - Aug 22)  
People are getting emotional, but if you can keep a lid on your temper, things should go well for you.

**Virgo** (Aug 23 - Sept 22)  
People cannot handle the stress of the day's activities, so do not pile on unnecessary criticism.

**Libra** (Sept 23 - Oct 22)  
You have far too much going on to take a break and it might all leave you feeling exhausted by tonight.

**Scorpio** (Oct 23 - Nov 21)  
You need to have more fun than usual. Make a game out of household chores or take the day off to hike.

**Sagittarius** (Nov 22 - Dec 21)  
Get things together early – you need to make sure your slow pace is getting you where you need to go.

**Capricorn** (Dec 22 - Jan 19)  
Your creative side is unleashed. Use this energy to help you communicate with someone important.

**Aquarius** (Jan 20 - Feb 18)  
Anything you share with a friend should make both your lives much more interesting if you play it right.

**Pisces** (Feb 19 - March 20)  
Your energy is bursting outwards. Reach out to folks you have not seen in ages or say hi to strangers.

• Provided by Astrology.com ([www.astrology.com](http://www.astrology.com))

Radio

KISS92

**AM**  
6.00 Maddy, Jason & Arnold In The Morning  
10.00 Carol Smith  
**PM**  
1.00 Charmaine Yee  
4.00 Shan Wee  
8.00 Josh's Goodnight Kiss

ONE FM 91.3

**AM**  
6.00 ONE FM's #1 Breakfast Show With Glenn And The Flying Dutchman  
10.00 Cheryl Miles  
**PM**  
4.00 Weekdays With ONE FM

MONEY FM 89.3

**AM**  
6.00 The Breakfast Huddle With Elliott Danker, Yasmin Jonkers & Ryan Huang  
10.00 Midday With Howie Lim  
**PM**  
2.00 Prime Time With Claressa Monteiro  
4.00 The Curve With Michelle Martin & Bernard Lim

UFM100.3

**AM**  
6.00 UFM100.3 Mornings With Wenhong, Limei & Xiaozhu  
10.00 Lively Life With Kevin  
**PM**  
1.00 Tea With Yuling  
4.00 Sing-a-long With Xinying & Weilong  
8.00 Feel The Night With Chengyao

96.3 HAO FM

**AM**  
6.00 Morning Drive Time With Jing Yun, De Ming And Jie Qi  
10.00 Lunch Break With Anna  
**PM**  
1.00 Automation  
4.00 Evening Drive Time With Li Yi And Guo Xian  
8.00 Night Time With Wei Wen

Tides

SUN RISE/SET TIME: 7:11am/7:14pm  
MOON RISE/SET TIME: 10:15am/10:33pm

**TIDES TODAY:** Singapore: 2:11am (2.8m), 7:26am (1.5m), 1:09pm (3m), 7:50pm (0.6m). Desaru: 1:54am (2.8m), 7:24am (1.8m), 12:33pm (2.6m), 7:13pm (0.8m). Port Dickson: 3:12am (0.4m), 8:58am (2.5m), 3:35pm (0.5m), 9:25pm (2.4m). Mersing: 1:24am (3.2m), 7:40am (1.9m), 12:15pm (2.4m), 6:35pm (1.1m).

**TIDES TOMORROW:** Singapore: 2:39am (2.8m), 8am (1.5m), 1:45pm (2.9m), 8:24pm (0.7m). Desaru: 2:24am (2.8m), 7:58am (1.7m), 1:16pm (2.5m), 7:48pm (1m). Port Dickson: 3:42am (0.4m), 9:30am (2.4m), 3:59pm (0.6m), 9:53pm (2.4m). Mersing: 1:57am (3.2m), 8:13am (1.9m), 12:58pm (2.3m), 7:04pm (1.2m).

For updates and more details, call Meteorological Service Singapore, NEA, on 6542-7788 or go to [www.nea.gov.sg](http://www.nea.gov.sg)



# Is Fan Bingbing making a comeback?

**HONG KONG** • Is Fan Bingbing eyeing a bid to secure, once again, her previous lofty position in Chinese entertainment?

On Chinese social media platform Weibo, photographs of the actress – whose star dimmed after a tax evasion scandal last year – have emerged, with the 37-year-old sporting a brand of eyewear.

A photograph also popped up on the Instagram account of her Thai fan club, with the caption mentioning a new 2019 line of eyewear.

It is not clear which company she is endorsing, but it has been reported previously that she herself owned an eyewear company.

The Weibo story, which speculated whether the advertisement could mark her first step towards making a comeback in March, drew mixed reactions, with not all netizens giving Fan their support.

Fan, who topped Forbes' 2017 list of top earners in China with 300 million yuan (\$60 million), was fined 883 million yuan by the authorities last year over tax evasion.

Television presenter Cui Yongyuan had revealed in May that the actress had received two contracts for her work in movie Air Strike, with the one with a lower amount to be used for tax reporting.

In the uproar that followed, on-line talk had it that she had been arrested when she disappeared from public view for about four months.

After the fine was imposed, she broke her silence, posting on Weibo on Oct 3 that she had "lost self-discipline in the face of monetary benefit".



Fan Bingbing is shown on an Instagram account of her Thai fan club, with the caption mentioning a new 2019 line of eyewear.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/  
FAN BINGBING\_  
THAILAND\_FC

"I sincerely apologise to society, to the friends who love and care for me, to the people, and to the country's tax bureau.

"Without the party and the country's great policies, without the people's loving care, there would be no Fan Bingbing," she wrote.

While she was photographed walking to a car outside Beijing airport on Oct 15, she has not been on the radar since.

Some netizens said she had been lucky to avoid a jail sentence, but that the authorities could have imposed other unreported punishments, apart from the fine.

Hong Kong's Apple Daily reported that Fan was banned by the authorities from acting for three years though this was never confirmed.

Rumours also swirled that she planned to marry actor Li Chen – who had backed her throughout her ordeal – and bow out of show business.

## On social media



**MARGOT ROBBIE TO PLAY BARBIE IN FILM:** The Australian actress, who stars as Queen Elizabeth in Mary Queen Of Scots, is set to play the queen of dolls – Barbie – in a live-action film based on the icon. "Playing with Barbie promotes confidence, curiosity and communication throughout a child's journey to self-discovery. Over the brand's almost 60 years, Barbie has empowered kids to imagine themselves in aspirational roles from a princess to president," Robbie said. PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/MARGOT.ROBBIE

# Bryan Cranston defends playing a wheelchair user

**LOS ANGELES** • Bryan Cranston said he was entitled to play any character on screen after netizens slammed him for taking on the role of a wheelchair-using billionaire in the movie The Upside.

The actor also pinned the decision by the movie-makers to cast him as a "business" one.

"We're very aware of the need to expand the opportunities for people with disabilities (but) I think being cast in this role as a quadriplegic really came down to a business decision," he told the British Press Association.

He was adamant that actors should be free to stretch their abilities and not bow to politically correct mandates.

"If I, as a straight, older person, and I'm wealthy, I'm very fortunate, does that mean I can't play a person who is not wealthy, does that mean I can't play a homosexual?" he said.

Cranston was not fazed by the backlash, saying: "We live in the world of criticism; if we are willing to get up and try something, we have to also be willing to take criticism."

The Breaking Bad actor, who had lobbied before for greater opportunities for disabled actors, follows in the wake of Jake Gyllenhaal and Dwayne Johnson who were also roasted for taking on disabled character roles.

Gyllenhaal, in 2017 film Stronger, portrayed a man who lost both legs in the Boston Marathon bombings; while Johnson played a man with a prosthetic leg in 2018 action film Skyscraper.

# Beyonce spotted at discount store Target

Superstar singer Beyonce in an orange jumpsuit checking out the wares at a Los Angeles outlet. PHOTO: TWITTER/BEYLEGION



**NEW YORK** • Even a multi-millionaire must get tired of shopping in ritzy boutiques.

How else to explain the fact that superstar singer Beyonce was spotted doing what many Americans enjoy doing – perusing the many useful bargains at discount store Target?

On Monday, her Beyhive fans were abuzz with excitement over photos of an orange jumpsuit-clad Beyonce checking out the wares at a Los Angeles outlet.

It is not known what the wife of rapper Jay-Z and mother of three bought, but the photos showed her in the diapers aisle, reported USA Today.

The HuffPost portal speculated that she could be shopping for a gift for daughter Blue Ivy, who turned seven on Monday.

Beyonce is actually no stranger to Target. She was also seen at another store in December 2017 shopping with her mother and Blue Ivy.

Supermodel Chrissy Teigen, who launched her own cookware line at Target in September, jumped on the latest Beyonce sighting to whip up some publicity for her products.

She tweeted: "Beyonce, you are so silly, I can just send you my new knives."

## In short

### Horror thriller Us to open South by Southwest Film Festival

The South by Southwest Film Festival has chosen one of this spring's most anticipated movies for its opening night in March: Jordan Peele's new horror thriller Us. The director's follow-up to his Oscar-winning 2017 hit Get Out follows a family terrorised by what seem to be evil doppelgangers of themselves.

### Weinstein to go on trial in May

Disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein will go on trial in Manhattan on May 6 on charges of sexually assaulting two women. He faces five charges, including rape, and a maximum sentence of life in prison if convicted.

### Partially shredded Banksy canvas to be exhibited

A partially destroyed Banksy canvas will be exhibited in Germany next month, the Frieder Burda museum in Baden-Baden said. The work, now called Love Is In The Bin, will be shown for the first time since it was created in a stunt at a Sotheby's auction in London in October.

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# 20% rise in dengue cases from 2017 to 2018

First week of 2019 sees 207 cases – the highest weekly figure since Sept 2016

Jolene Ang

Last year saw a sharp rise in the number of dengue cases from 2017, with 3,285 cases reported. This was almost 20 per cent more than the 2,772 recorded in the preceding 12 months, the National Environment Agency (NEA) said yesterday.

That trend has continued into the new year, with the first week of 2019 seeing 207 cases – the highest weekly number since September 2016.

A contributing factor and key concern is the increase in the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito population detected in the community, said NEA.

Last month, the agency's Gravitrap surveillance system detected about 40 per cent more *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, compared with December 2017. Gravitraps are traps that catch *Aedes* mosquitoes and collect data on them.

The NEA noted that although there is no signal for a major outbreak, the increased *Aedes* mosquito population in the community, coupled with the high current number of dengue cases, may lead to a surge in case numbers this year.

The figures of the past two years, however, are far lower than those of the preceding years. Between



The National Environment Agency says that the increased *Aedes* mosquito population in the community, coupled with the high current number of dengue cases, may lead to a surge in case numbers this year. ST PHOTO: SHABANA BEGUM

2013 and 2016, the annual total of dengue cases was above 11,000.

Among reasons for the sharp drop, the NEA said last year, were the immunity of the local population following the high number of dengue cases in the past few years, and the use of more Gravitraps (from a few thousand deployed in late 2015 to about 50,000 currently).

Last year, the NEA conducted about a million inspections for mos-

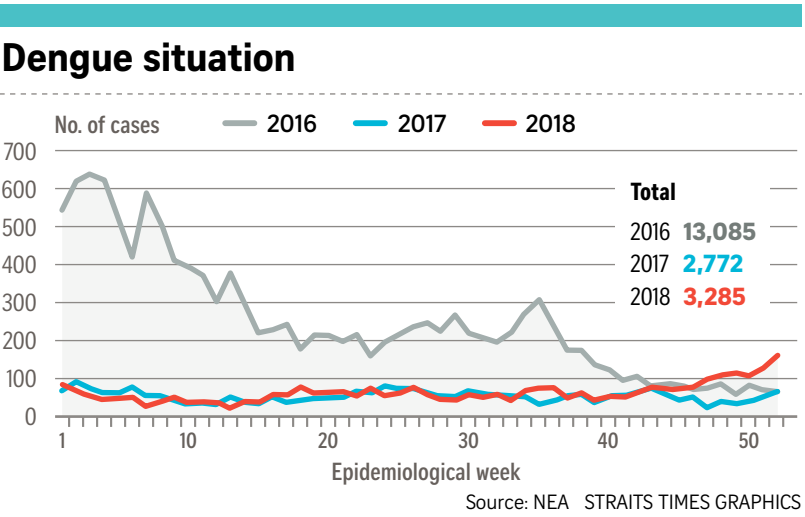
quito breeding which uncovered 18,000 breeding habitats. About 4,100 households were fined for breeding and 40 construction sites were issued stop-work orders.

As of Tuesday, there were 37 active dengue clusters, while the biggest cluster in the past two weeks was in Bedok Reservoir Road, with 24 cases, followed by that in Pandan Gardens, with 15 cases.

Ms Chua Lay Choo, 70, who

works in online goods packaging, said she noticed her neighbours clearing flowerpots and emptying pails at Block 136 Bedok Reservoir Road on Tuesday. "It's reassuring to see this, as these are usually the main cause of mosquito breeding."

The NEA has urged the public to be vigilant and to remove mosquito breeding habitats in order to prevent the spread of dengue, as well as Zika and chikungunya viruses.



With Chinese New Year approaching, the NEA has also urged more vigilance in spring cleaning, such as disposing of refuse and decorating with ornamental plants, in order to avoid unintentionally creating mosquito breeding habitats.

With Chinese New Year approaching, the NEA has also urged more vigilance in spring cleaning, such as disposing of refuse and decorating with ornamental plants, in order to avoid unintentionally creating mosquito breeding habitats.

It also cautioned those travelling overseas to "mosquito-proof" their homes. This includes covering toilet bowls, sealing the overflow pipe of the flushing cistern and adding

sand granular insecticide to areas where stagnant water cannot be easily removed.

Updates on the dengue situation can be found on NEA's website, the Stop Dengue Now Facebook page, or the myENV app.

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• Additional reporting by Shabana Begum

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# Missing dog died while boarded at Platinum: AVA

Agency's investigations into beleaguered pet facility continue

Toh Ting Wei

A dog reported missing from the Platinum Dogs Club died while boarded at the facility, the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) revealed yesterday.

Prince, a shetland sheepdog, was reported missing on Facebook by his owner, Ms Elaine Mao, on Dec 30 last year. She appealed for information about him and offered a \$2,000 reward to anyone who found him, sparking a hunt among members of the public.

However, the AVA, which raided the Bukit Panjang boarding facility after complaints of mistreatment of pets in its care, said in a Facebook post yesterday that preliminary investigations revealed that Prince "had died while boarded there and was cremated by a pet cremation service provider".

Ms Mao, in a Facebook post, called the news "totally unbearable", adding that "a part of me has gone with him".

She said she had paid \$945 to check Prince into the facility on Dec 16 before she went overseas.

Ms Mao said she had asked the owner - whose name she gave as Charlotte Liew - for video updates

about her pet, but these did not always arrive. She said Ms Liew told her on Dec 30 that Prince had run out of the facility during the AVA raid the day before.

Tensions over Prince's whereabouts led to a group of angry dog owners, including Ms Mao, staging a protest outside Platinum last week.

A 40-year-old man in the group was taken to Ng Teng Fong General Hospital for outpatient treatment after being hit by a car in which the operator of the pet boarding facility was travelling.

Last Saturday, Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam called for all parties involved to let the authorities carry out their investigations and not take the law into their own hands.

The 30-year-old owner of Platinum Dogs Club was arrested on Sunday.

Both Ms Mao and Ms Liew did not respond to queries from The Straits Times by press time.

The AVA, which had taken temporary custody of the 18 dogs and one rabbit found inside the facility, said yesterday that 17 of the dogs have been reunited with their owners, while the owner of the remaining one is overseas. It has yet to identify the rabbit's owner.

Prince's disappearance was not the only controversy that Platinum had attracted in recent weeks. There are at least three



Prince was reported missing on Dec 30 last year, after his owner checked him into Platinum Dogs Club on Dec 16. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/ELAINE MAO YANLAN

**AVA said in a Facebook post yesterday that preliminary investigations revealed that Prince "had died while boarded there and was cremated by a pet cremation service provider".**

spitz was returned in an unkempt condition with a pungent smell after a week's stay at Platinum between Dec 18 and Dec 25.

An online petition appealing for stiffer punishment against animal abuse has been set up as a result of the allegations of abuse.

The change.org petition, started by digital marketer Roderick Low on Jan 3, has already attracted more than 61,000 signatures.

Investigations into Platinum are continuing.

Under the Animals and Birds Act, convicted offenders who fail in their duty of care towards animals while conducting an animal-related business can face a fine of up to \$40,000, a jail term of two years, or both.

"The public is advised not to speculate and let the investigations take its course," the AVA said.

"AVA takes animal welfare seriously and will take enforcement action against any offenders to safeguard animal welfare."

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# Two weeks' jail for driver who caused pedestrian's death

Fabian Koh



Soh Han Seong, 42, was yesterday sentenced to two weeks' jail and disqualified from driving for five years.

A 42-year-old Uber driver hit a pedestrian in Tiong Bahru Road in January last year, knocking him unconscious. The victim, a Philippine national, never regained consciousness and died later that day.

For causing the death of Mr Erwin Delacana Bermejo, also 42, Soh Han Seong was yesterday sentenced to two weeks' jail and disqualified from driving for five years.

District Judge Luke Tan allowed Soh, who pleaded guilty in November last year, to spend Chinese New Year with his family and he will begin serving his sentence on Feb 11.

Bail remained at \$15,000.

The court heard that on Jan 27 last year at about 4.45pm, Soh was driving on the right lane of the two-lane Tiong Bahru Road, heading towards Outram Road. He was ferrying a passenger to Sentosa.

He did not notice Mr Bermejo, who was crossing the road, until it was too late, and could not brake in time. Soh's vehicle collided with the pedestrian, who was taken to Singapore General Hospital (SGH), where he died at 9.48pm that evening.

The weather was fine during the accident, the road surface dry, the road ahead clear and there was nothing that would have affected Soh's visibility, the court heard.

A medical report said Mr Bermejo lost consciousness after the accident and he was bleeding from his scalp and mouth on arrival at SGH. A CT scan showed multiple fractures in his head, chest, abdomen and pelvis. He went into cardiac arrest and did not respond to resuscitation.

For causing death through a negligent act not amounting to culpable homicide, Soh could have been jailed for up to two years and fined.

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	Cars up to 1,600cc and 130bhp	Cars above 1,600cc or 130bhp	Commercial vehicles	Motorcycles	Open
Yesterday's tender	\$25,920	\$32,200	\$27,002	\$3,610	\$32,909
Dec 19 tender	\$25,501	\$31,001	\$27,001	\$3,789	\$31,809

Source: LAND TRANSPORT AUTHORITY STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

# Car COE premiums rise ahead of motor show

Certificate of entitlement (COE) prices for new vehicles ended mostly higher at the latest tender yesterday - the eve of the 2019 Singapore Motorshow.

COE premiums for cars up to 1,600cc and 130bhp finished 1.6 per cent higher at \$25,920. Those for cars above 1,600cc or 130bhp closed up 3.9 per cent at \$32,200.

Premiums for Open COEs, which can be used for any vehicle type except motorcycles but end up mostly for cars, ended at \$32,909 or 3.5 per cent higher than three weeks ago.

Commercial vehicle COE prices hardly changed, ending just \$1 higher at \$27,002.

The premium for motorcycles bucked the trend by ending 4.7 per cent lower at \$3,610. But it jumped by more than \$1,500 in the last minute of bidding on bulk bids - a sign that speculation among big players is back.

Motor dealers expect the Singapore Motorshow, which starts today, to drum up buying interest. Several new models - including a number of electric cars - will be launched at the event.

Mr Nicholas Wong, general manager of Honda agent Kah Motor, said: "Companies want to set the prices before the show. After the show, it'd be a new ball game."

Mr Wong said the three-week gap between the latest tender and the previous one had also contributed to more aggressive bidding. Usually, the gap is two weeks, but it became three because certain months are longer than four weeks.

Market players also point to the continuous interest in hybrid cars among taxi and private-hire companies as another reason the Category B premium (for bigger cars) is rising. The new hybrid models tend to have engines which are bigger than 1,600cc.

Adding to the pressure will be the all-electric cars, most of which will fall in the Category B segment.

Christopher Tan

# Woman found dead in Little India hostel



The body of a 33-year-old woman being removed from the Vya House hostel in Roberts Lane yesterday. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

Tan Tam Mei

A woman was found dead in a Little India hostel yesterday afternoon.

The 33-year-old was found lying motionless in a shophouse in Roberts Lane after police were alerted at about 1pm.

The woman, believed to be an Indian national, was pronounced dead by paramedics at the scene.

Police are investigating the matter as a case of unnatural death.

The manager of the Vya House hostel, who gave his name only as Mr Sheng, said the woman had been staying at the hostel for about six months.

"She lived alone and usually came out of the room for meals," said Mr Sheng, who has been working there for about 10 years.

He said he thought the woman was unemployed and was in Singapore as a tourist.

However, The Straits Times understands that she was a sex worker. It is not known if she operated out of the hostel.

A few days earlier, the woman had said she felt unwell and had visited the doctor, Mr Sheng said.

"I didn't see her come out of her room for about two to three days, so I went to knock on the door and check on her," he said.

ST visited the scene at around 4.30pm and saw police officers carrying transparent bags filled with pills and money out of the shophouse. It is understood that the woman did not have any wounds on her body.

Shopkeepers in the area said the unit had changed hands a few times over the last decade, and they were not sure when the hostel opened.

They also did not interact with the hostel manager.

"We don't know who owns the place," said Mr Desmond Chan, 29, a manager of a shop nearby.

"We never really took notice of the unit, and they are usually very quiet. The only thing we know about them is that they keep a lot of birds in there."

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# Helping patients who are hard to care for

**Geriatric ward nurses equipped with skills to manage dementia-related behavioural issues**

**Vanessa Liu**

In one special ward at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, the soothing sounds of Chinese oldies can be heard playing on a speaker. Behind the closed doors, nurses quietly engage patients in sorting puzzles, chatting about their childhood days, or even playing a game of mahjong.

These activities, tailored to improve the cognitive abilities of the older patients, are part of the specialised care in the Subacute Geriatric Monitoring Unit (GMU) of the hospital. The ward is meant for patients who suffer from delirium or behavioural problems associated with dementia, on top of other medical problems.

The six-bedded ward, set up in November 2017 to resolve some of

the complexities of treating patients with dementia, has housed over 80 female patients to date. These patients had been admitted for medical problems but were hard to care for in the general wards as they were uncooperative with treatment, or tended to wander.

Associate consultant at the hospital's Centre for Geriatric Medicine, Dr Lim Jun Pei, said patients with behavioural issues arising from dementia need greater engagement for effective rehabilitation, which nurses and therapists in general wards are unequipped to handle.

She said: "Nurses who do not have the technical know-how will have problems engaging and communicating with patients with behavioural issues due to dementia."

A team of 30 nurses working in the ward has been trained in inter-

vention techniques to deal with issues such as wandering, aggressive behaviour and refusal to take food or medication.

The training provides nurses with knowledge on dementia-related topics, pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatment methods and diagnostic tests for the patients, among other things.

Senior staff nurse Nurul Shakilla, 29, who has worked in the unit since it was set up, said the nurses have to take note of patients' likes and dislikes and adapt accordingly.

Referring to a patient who is prone to wandering because she wants to go home, Ms Nurul said: "Sometimes we will just walk with her, and talk to her. She likes to talk about her past. When you start talking to her she gets distracted and eventually won't even think about going home anymore."

Patients in the GMU are assessed by doctors, nurses and therapists during weekly rounds to see if they can be discharged, either to their



Research assistant Eileen Fabia Goh engaging a patient with flash cards in Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Subacute Geriatric Monitoring Unit. The ward caters to female patients admitted for other medical conditions but also suffer from dementia-related delirium and behavioural problems which make them difficult to care for. ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

own homes or to community hospitals or nursing homes for further care. On average, a patient stays in the unit for two to three weeks. The GMU caters only to female pa-

tients currently. "We would like a similar Subacute GMU for male patients as well, but it's still in the planning stage," said Dr Lim. By 2030, the number of people

with dementia in Singapore is expected to more than double to 103,000.

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## Teen actors role play for medical students at KKH

**Felicia Choo**

For doctors, learning how to communicate well with patients can be tricky – especially when the patients are teenagers.

To help prepare medical students to treat teenage patients, a programme at the KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) lets undergraduates practise by having conversations with young theatre actors.

In each three-hour session, students from Duke-NUS Medical School and Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine at Nanyang Technological University talk to the actors about difficult-to-broach topics such as sexual health or puberty, drug use, underage smoking and alcohol use.

They are also given communication tips and receive feedback from both the actors and KKH doctors as they go through the group exercises.

The aim of the adolescent simulated patient programme – which started in August 2016 – is to help students refine their communication skills with teenage patients, said Dr Kumudhini Rajasegaran, head of KKH's Adolescent Medicine Service.

She said: "As physicians, we have the responsibility to open discussions around these issues with our adolescent patients as they may not feel so comfortable."

To make the conversations realistic, participating actors are aged between 16 and 18, and trained by KKH doctors to act as patients, and give constructive feedback.

The actors are from Buds Theatre, a non-profit group with platforms for young theatre graduates to practise their craft. Each session has about 15 medical students and seven actors, and the students attend the session only once.

So far, about 200 medical students have participated in the programme, which is compulsory for those who do a paediatric clinical rotation at KKH.

The outcomes are encouraging. Surveys by KKH found that students improved their skills in things like conducting interviews with teenage patients, discussing doctor-patient confidentiality, establishing rapport with patients and their parents, and negotiating for time alone with patients.

Students were also more confident in discussing tricky topics such as alcohol and tobacco use, as well as sexual health.

Ms Cheryl Woo, 28, a second-year medical student, said: "It's impossible to have a conversation about sensitive issues without fumbling the first time."

"So, it was great we were able to do so in a safe environment where we could get feedback and polish our skills."

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# SP Group launches e-car charging points

First batch of 38 points at eight sites near food centres; firm aims to roll out 1,000 by 2020

**Christopher Tan**  
Senior Transport Correspondent

Energy provider SP Group has rolled out its first batch of electric vehicle charging points, in time for ride-hailing firm Grab to plug into a fleet of electric cars.

The 38 points – 19 43 kilowatt (kw) alternate current (AC) chargers and 19 50kw direct current (DC) chargers – are able to power up a mid-sized electric car within an hour, compared with six to eight hours via household chargers.

SP said yesterday the points are at eight locations across the island, with all sited near food centres to allow drivers to take a break while their cars are being juiced up.

They are the first of 1,000 charging points SP aims to launch by 2020. About one-quarter of the total will be DC chargers.

Users can locate and access available charging points via the SP app,

which can be downloaded from the iTunes App Store and Google Play.

The app alerts users when charging is completed, and facilitates payment via DBS and POSB cards. Other cards will be included soon, SP said.

The AC system will charge a mid-sized car in 45 to 60 minutes, while the DC charger will do so within half an hour or so. SP said it plans to introduce 350kw chargers, which can provide a full charge in about 15 minutes, “over the next few years”.

Currently, rates are 41.4 and 47.3 cents per kilowatt hour for its AC and DC chargers, respectively.

At these rates, SP said drivers will see at least 50 per cent cost savings compared with those who drive comparable petrol-powered models.

But The Straits Times understands Grab will have discounted rates for drivers of its electric fleet.

The company is expected to take delivery of 20 Hyundai Kona Electric crossovers this month. These cars – with a range in excess of 400km on a full charge – are part of

200 units Grab has ordered.

The ride-hailing firm announced last August that it would introduce the cars as part of a partnership with SP Group.

When contacted, Hyundai agent Komoco would only say it had sold some Kona Electric cars to Grab and ComfortDelGro. It will unveil the car at the Singapore Motorshow today.

With seven new battery-powered models due to be launched here this year, the percentage of electric cars is set to rise from its currently negligible share of less than 0.1 per cent.

But industry watchers said consumers – the vast majority of whom live in high-rises – will consider switching only when a sizeable public charging network is in place.

SP Group chief executive Wong Kim Yin said SP’s charging network will “encourage a wider adoption of green mobility in Singapore, and enable drivers to save”.

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**SCAN TO WATCH**  
How to use SP Group's electric vehicle charging point.  
<http://str.sg/charge>



SP Group's high-speed electric vehicle charging points, consisting of 19 43kilowatt (kw) alternate current chargers and 19 50kw direct current chargers, are able to charge a mid-sized electric car within an hour. ST PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER TAN

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## Women’s groups call for greater workplace flexibility

Rei Kurohi

Greater flexibility in work arrangements was a key theme at a dialogue between women’s groups and Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office, Ms Indranee Rajah, last night.

Ms K. Thanaletchimi, honorary general secretary of the Singapore Council of Women’s Organisations (SCWO) and president of NTUC Women and Family Unit, for instance, suggested that the Government could educate and encourage employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, “so that women don’t have to retreat from the workplace when they need to care for their families”.

The two-hour dialogue at the SCWO headquarters in Waterloo Street was organised for female leaders and women’s groups to engage with the Government.

Dr June Goh, president of the SCWO, suggested that employers could convert childcare leave entitlements to additional parent-care leave, especially for older women whose children are grown up.

Ms Corinna Lim, executive director of the Association of Women for Action and Research, noted that caring for elderly parents is a growing concern.

She said: “Women whose parents become aged often find they have to give up their jobs and bear the costs of their parents’ care out of pocket... We do not want to see these women age into poverty.”

Ms Indranee agreed that flexible arrangements could be beneficial not just for working women but also for their employers.

She said: “We should encourage employers to be more family friendly, while balancing their concerns about productivity. But when employers are willing to be flexible, employees are often more than willing to give back.”

Ms Carrie Tan, executive director of women’s charity group Daughters of Tomorrow, highlighted that women who work irregular hours face difficulty in getting their children to and from childcare centres.

She said that the charity group had started a peer-to-peer child-minding programme, in which women link up to help mind each other’s children when needed.

Ms Tan suggested that the Government could extend childcare subsidies to similar home-based child-minding programmes or remunerate women who provide informal care.

Other topics raised during the dialogue included the higher premiums paid by women, compared with men, for the CareShield Life insurance plan, and the lack of legal avenues for women who wish to freeze their eggs in Singapore.

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# NUS sues 3 firms for \$55m over fire caused by gas leak

It says their alleged negligence when undertaking tasks resulted in five-hour blaze on Aug 10, 2012

**K. C. Vijayan**  
Senior Law Correspondent

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is suing three companies for \$55.3 million following a fire caused by a gas leak at its Solar Energy Research Institute of Singapore (Seris).

The afternoon blaze on Aug 10, 2012, which took firefighters nearly five hours to douse, caused NUS to spend more than \$46 million on rebuilding a laboratory and replacing equipment at the institute. The sum forms the bulk of the damages it is seeking to recover from the three defendants.

They are: Air Liquide Singapore (ALS), Mechlink Quality Management, and a proprietor husband and employee wife who traded as J-Quest Engineering & Trading.

Their alleged negligence when undertaking tasks at the Seris premises caused the fire, the university said in its lawsuit before the High Court. A pre-trial conference was held on Tuesday.

The fire, on the ground floor of Block E3A at the NUS Kent Ridge campus, was caused by a leakage of silane – a colourless, gaseous and flammable compound – which ignited when a vent valve was displaced at the Valve Manifold Box (VMB). Seris conducts industry-oriented research and development in solar energy conversion and occupies four floors of the seven-storey building.

In court papers filed by its lawyer K. Anparasan of White-Fern LLC, NUS claims the workers of the three defendants were working at or close to the silane VMB at Cleanroom1B then.

ALS, a gas manufacturer that designed and supplied the gas systems used at Seris, was then installing and testing new gas pipelines to connect a multi-stack tube furnace in Cleanroom1B to the existing gas system, among other things.

Mechlink's staff were present at the premises then, to conduct quality assurance checks on the newly installed pipelines while J-Quest's workers were doing related cabling works close to the VMB.

NUS claims the serious and widespread damage extended to the external face of the building, exhaust polypropylene and fibreglass ducts running from level 1 to the air scrubbers on the rooftop.

ALS, defended by lawyers Tito Isaac and Gokulamurali Haridass, denies the claims, saying NUS was aware the silane gas was not switched off at source before the works started and should have taken steps to ensure the silane VMB was locked at all times, among other things.

Mechlink, defended by lawyers Loh Ling Wei and Teo Weng Kie, argues that its role was to carry out quality assurance checks on newly installed gas lines not commissioned at the material time. It also alleges NUS contributed to or caused the damage through its own negligence.

Lawyer Raymond Wong, in defending J-Quest, denies liability and said owner Hong Yong Tiong died in 2016 and his wife Tan Lee Kiang took over. The company de-registered last year.

An NUS spokesman said yesterday the damage to the premises and equipment has been repaired and the facilities restored.

It also has in place preventive measures to minimise fire risks on campus and these include a Rapid Response Team to provide quick intermediate response before the arrival of firefighters, she said.

vijayan@sph.com.sg



The fire at the Solar Energy Research Institute of Singapore was caused by a leakage of silane – a colourless, gaseous and flammable compound. ST FILE PHOTO

## Man killed cat by hurling it down 14 floors, guilty of animal cruelty

**Fabian Koh**

A mentally ill man stuffed his sister-in-law's cat into a haversack and threw it down 14 floors to its death.

For his actions in 2017, Mohd Noor Hassan, 42, was found guilty of animal cruelty by District Judge May Mesenas yesterday. He will be back in court for sentencing on Feb 11.

The unemployed man, who lives on the sixth floor of Block 866, Jurong West Street 81, had grabbed the cat, put it in his haversack and taken a lift to the 14th floor where he threw the haversack to the ground floor, the court heard.

The cat, a tri-coloured feline named Jun, belonged to his sister-in-law Safiah Mohamed Kamal, 47, who lives in the same flat as him.

Mr Yap Teck Chuan, prosecuting officer for the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA), told the court that on Aug 18, 2017, at about 7.20pm, a witness had informed police about a cat being thrown "from a high floor" in Noor's block.

Police officers found a haversack at the foot of the block near

the rubbish chute. The cat was inside the bag. The police conducted a floor-by-floor search and arrested Noor in his unit.

The case was later referred to AVA for further investigation into the offence of animal cruelty.

The probe revealed that Noor had grabbed the cat by the neck and stuffed it inside his haversack.

After throwing the haversack from the 14th storey, Noor took the lift to the ground level to retrieve it. However, a passer-by stopped him from doing so, and told him that he had informed the police.

Knowing that the police would soon arrive, Noor went home.

There were no visible injuries on the cat's body. A post-mortem at the AVA Laboratory revealed that it had died from "fatal external traumatic incident resulting in organ contusion and laceration, involving blunt-force trauma". This means that the fall from height led to its demise.

For breaching the Animals and Birds Act, Noor can be fined up to \$15,000 and jailed up to 1½ years.



Mohd Noor Hassan, 42, will be back in court for sentencing on Feb 11. The cat belonged to his sister-in-law.

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SINGAPORE WORKS: URBAN DESIGN

Designing both a city and a country

Across Singapore, high-rise public flats tower over the urban landscape. More than 80 per cent of Singaporeans live in Housing Board units, making the humble HDB flat one of the Republic's most prominent success stories.

But every new development – from housing to transport infrastructure and amenities – happens only through careful planning.

Founded in 1974, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) leads the charge in shaping the big picture. It creates sustainable long-term plans that direct the physical development of Singapore, working with the HDB and other government agencies.

"Singapore is both a city and a country, which means that we have to plan for both the needs of a city and a country," said Mr Wang Wei, 37, URA's director of physical planning for north-east Singapore.

What goes on behind the urban design of towns? The last episode of Singapore Works – a video series about the people and processes that enable Singapore to function seamlessly – zooms in on Punggol and the upcoming Tengah town.



ST PHOTOS: ST VIDEO

WATCH THE VIDEO  
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Woman on trial over 169 cheating charges

Man duped of at least \$130k and old pal who roped him in conned of over \$10k, court told

Shaffiq Alkhatib

A former cleaner allegedly handed over more than \$10,000 of her savings to a friend of about 30 years to take part in a purported investment scheme that did not exist, a district court heard yesterday.

Madam Boo Sok Hiang, 71, later introduced her long-time friend – petrol pump attendant Tan Soy Kiang – to the scheme because she

wanted him to benefit financially.

In 1999, Mr Tan withdrew his entire Central Provident Fund (CPF) savings and allegedly handed the cash to dishwasher Tan Hwee Ngo. After that, he allegedly gave the accused at least \$500 monthly via Madam Boo.

Referring to Mr Tan, 74, as Ah Tan, Madam Boo – who died of heart disease on April 21, 2016 – told the police: "If I had known this scheme was non-existent, I would not have roped Ah Tan in." Her police statements were read out in court yesterday, the first day of Tan Hwee Ngo's trial for allegedly cheating Mr Tan of at least \$130,000.

The 69-year-old is accused of dishonestly inducing Mr Tan into withdrawing \$53,161.64 from his CPF savings account in 1999 by saying payments were needed for a Mr Lee Kuan Yew. She also allegedly used the same reason to cheat Mr Tan into handing over at least \$500 monthly of his money from 2000 to 2013.

It was not mentioned in court if the Mr Lee whom Tan had allegedly referred to was Singapore's late founding prime minister. Tan now faces 169 cheating charges.

Quoting Madam Boo's police statements, Station Inspector (SI) Manoj Kalwani told the court Tan Hwee Ngo was the mastermind, while Madam Boo had acted as a middleman between Mr Tan and the accused. SI Kalwani also testified Madam Boo had handed over between \$10,000 and \$20,000 of her own money to the accused over a period of about 15 years.

The case came to light when Mr Tan's niece, Madam Pamela Lim Puay San, lodged a police report on Feb 3, 2014, stating that her uncle had been giving away all of his income to a woman.

SI Kalwani told District Judge Terence Tay that officers recorded statements from Tan and Madam Boo.

Madam Boo gave the police another statement on Jan 12, 2016. Quoting her second statement, SI Kalwani testified that she referred to Tan Hwee Ngo as "Ah Ngo".

Madam Boo said: "It started when Ah Ngo mentioned that Yeo Hiap Seng had this intention to help senior citizens by giving high returns.

"To take part in this scheme, I can contribute \$390 and I will get back \$500 from Yeo Hiap Seng...I decided to take up this offer and invested \$390 which I gave Ah Ngo in cash."

When she did not receive any returns, she approached Tan who allegedly told her that Mr Lee Kuan Yew had stepped in to take over "this senior citizen scheme".

Madam Boo told police that according to her friend, since Mr Lee had taken over, he needed to do "a lot of administrative and legal procedures" so the subscribers needed to continue to contribute to the legal and admin payments.

She added: "Ah Ngo kept telling me that if I don't pay by the following day, I would need to pay double. So, I was just scared and did not want to... get into trouble."

The trial resumes today.

ashaffiq@sph.com.sg



Tan Hwee Ngo, 69, is accused of being the mastermind of the alleged scam. ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CHOW



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**Venue** : National University of Singapore  
Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies  
Auditorium, Level 1  
Clinical Research Centre, Block MD 11  
10 Medical Drive, Singapore 117597



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**\$1.19** /100g  
**AUSTRALIA**  
Cherries  
U.P. \$2.49



**AIR FLOWN**

**SAVE 25%**

**2 FOR \$5.95**  
**SOUTH AFRICA**  
Seedless Grapes  
Red/Green  
500g per punnet  
U.P. 2 for \$7.90



**MIX & MATCH**

**SAVE 32%**

**2 FOR \$9.50**  
**KOREA**  
Maehyang Strawberries  
250g per punnet  
U.P. 2 for \$13.90



**AIR FLOWN**

**SAVE 61%**

**19¢** /100g  
**CHINA**  
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U.P. \$4.90



**SAVE 30%**

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### GROCERY NEEDS

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**OLIVER'S**  
Tempura Nuggets/  
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Assorted  
420g - 500g  
U.P. 2 for \$7.90



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**BEN & JERRY'S**  
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Assorted  
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Ipoh White Coffee  
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Australia  
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Assorted  
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**SAVE 30%**

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**MIX & MATCH**

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Spin Mop  
Red/Blue  
6L  
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TOP PICKS

**Prepare to travel**  
Straits Times travel writer Lee Siew Hua will be spearheading the next askST@NLB talk and giving the lowdown on 2019's desirable destinations. The talk is on Jan 25 at the Central Public Library Programme Zone of the National Library Board, 7pm to 8.30pm. Visit [str.sg/askSiewHua2](http://str.sg/askSiewHua2) to register.

askST@NLB

you ask,  
we answer,  
come listen

**Red packet giveaway**  
Pick up an exclusive set of red packets with your copy of The New Paper at selected MRT stations on Jan 17, while stocks last. The stations are Bishan, Braddell, Bugis, City Hall, Dhoby Ghaut, Novena, Orchard, Raffles Place, Somerset, Tampines, Tanjong Pagar and Toa Payoh.



**Buns out**  
Hotdogs, burgers, baos — for January's Visa Foodie Trail, try everything between two buns at participating restaurants, including Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park's Grub. Visa cardholders enjoy 18 per cent off items on the a la carte menu. Visit [www.visafoodietrail.sg](http://www.visafoodietrail.sg) to see the full list of restaurants.



**Kids dine free**  
From now until April, turn every meal into a family meal at over 25 participating restaurants across the island. For Kids Dine Free, every paying adult holding a HSBC Visa Platinum card can have one child dine free alongside them. Visit [www.kidsdinefree.sg](http://www.kidsdinefree.sg) to see all the participating restaurants.



Head to Nouri for a feast that celebrates cultural connections. PHOTOS: SPHERE EXHIBITS

# Crossroads cooking at its finest

Experience a human connection through food at Nouri for January's Visa Infinite Gourmet

Mark your calendars — on Jan 23, Nouri will be the place to be for the very best of international cuisine. Best known for its “crossroads cuisine”, innovative dishes big on global influences, the establishment attained its first Michelin star in early 2017 and has since become a well-known fixture on the fine dining scene.

Helmed by Chef Ivan Brehm, who helped The Kitchen at Bacchanalia get its first Michelin star in 2016, Nouri boasts a dining experience that tells a story. The food at Nouri takes inspiration from all across the globe, placing emphasis on highlighting the similarities between cultures and places rather than the differences.

As a result of a collaboration with Singapore-based designer Akita Kita, the chef's table at Nouri sits at the heart of the restaurant, so diners can view it as a centre stage for chefs, where interaction, art and consumption happen all at once.

Chef Brehm is both the owner and head chef at Nouri, and can attribute his eclectic cuisine to his Italian, German, Russian, Spanish, Leba-

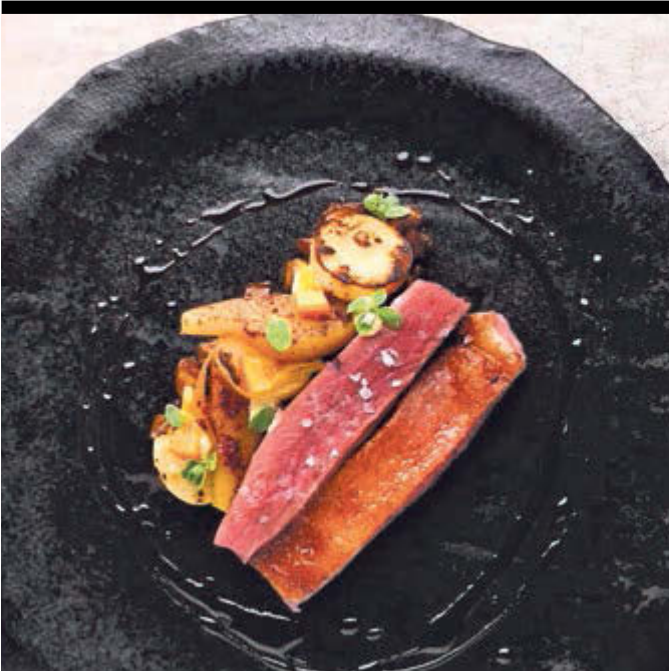
nese, Syrian and Brazilian heritage. Under him is Matthew Chan, the restaurant and beverage manager, renowned for being the youngest ever certified sommelier in Singapore at his point of certification.

At Visa Infinite Gourmet, Chef Brehm will be presenting a specially curated menu inspired by his lineage and travels. Be prepared to be taken on a gastronomic journey, enhanced by pairings with the finest sakes of Shichiken.

Visa Infinite cardmembers get 20 per cent off; all other Visa cardmembers enjoy 15 per cent off all Visa Infinite Gourmet events.



Chef Brehm's complex heritage inspires his cuisine.



## Two hands to clap

From Jan 21 to 25, head to Pollen, located within the Flower Dome at Gardens by the Bay, for a feast that crosses continents.

For this month's edition of 4 Hands Kitchen, a year-long dining programme where pairs of renowned chefs collaborate on new and premium menus, Pollen's chef Steve Allen will be hosting one Michelin-starred Chef Renato Favaro of Como from Luxembourg.

This will mark the first time the two chefs come together and it will be interesting to see what happens when Chef Allen's English upbringing and Malaysian experience (at Kuala Lumpur's The Delicious Group) comes up against chef Favaro's Italian taste buds and French cooking techniques.

Citi cardmembers enjoy 20 per cent off the 4 Hands Kitchen menu, while Citi Prestige cardmembers also receive exclusive dining privileges.

Make reservations at [www.4handskitchen.com.sg](http://www.4handskitchen.com.sg) or call 6319-4038.



## Wine and dine

On Jan 31, Gusto Italiano's next stop will be Grissini, at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel.

A contemporary Italian grill restaurant that specialises in premium meats and seafood, Grissini is famed for giving classic Italian favourites a unique twist.

Gusto Italiano is a year-long celebration of Italian cuisine at different restaurants.

The dinner will be headed by Head Chef Mirko Vinci, who is from South Italy's Puglia region and grew up working alongside a multitude of Michelin-starred chefs.

He will be presenting a specially crafted five-course menu, accompanied by wines from Sicilia and Toscana.

HSBC cardholders enjoy 20 per cent off all Gusto Italiano events, and will also receive 15 per cent off a la carte food bills at monthly participating restaurants throughout the year.

For reservations, visit [www.gustoitaliano.com.sg](http://www.gustoitaliano.com.sg) or call 6319-4038.



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Thu 10 Jan to Wed 16 Jan 2019  
Receive a **Prosperity Tin** with an **Apron** OR a set of **Pot Holder & Oven Mitten** with a minimum spend of \$238 at Household & Interior Departments, B1 or Food Hall & Takashimaya Square, B2. DBS Takashimaya Cardholders only need to spend \$208. Redemption at Rest Area, B1 (beside Tableware section). Limited to 2 redemptions per customer.

Thu 10 Jan to Sun 13 Jan 2019  
First 150 DBS/POSB Cardholders daily will receive a **\$10 Voucher** with a minimum spend of \$250 (max. 3 same-day receipts) at Takashimaya Square & Food Hall, B2. DBS Takashimaya Cardholders only need to spend \$180 to qualify.

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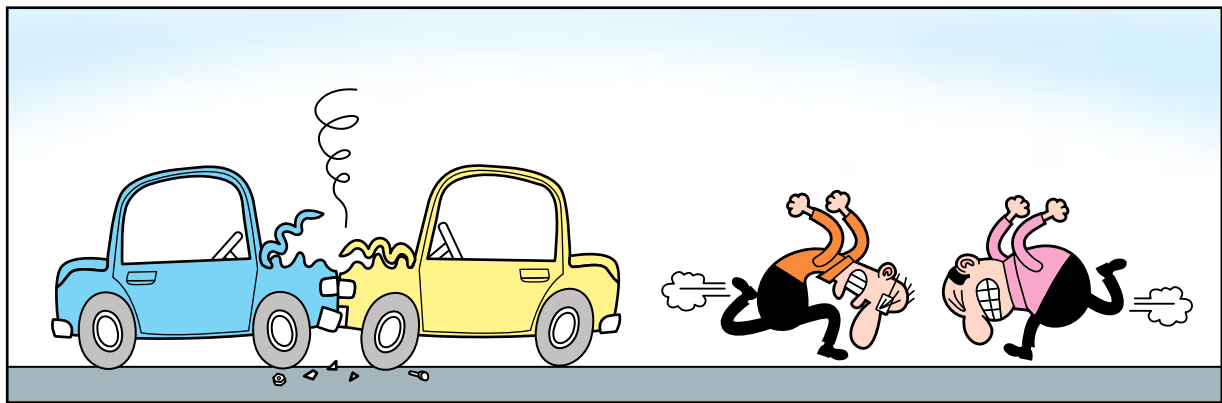
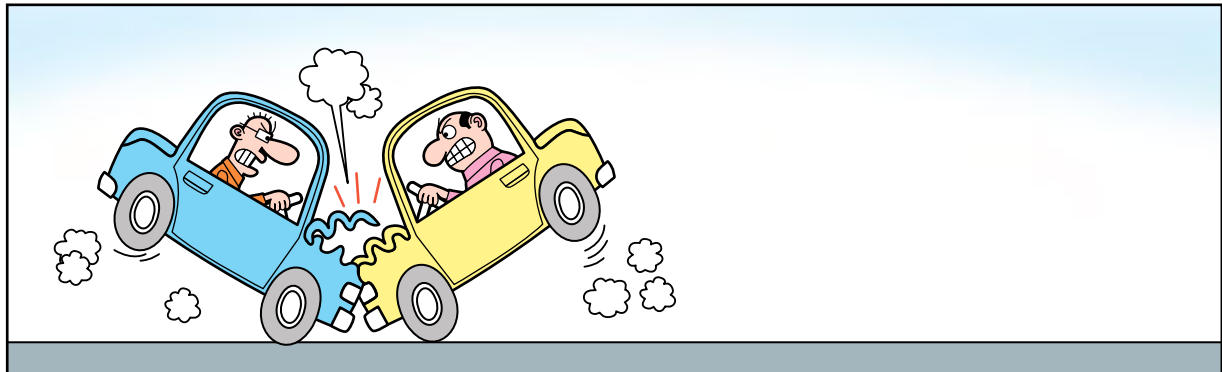
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# FORUM

## muel's TAKE

### Road rage



### Carry warning labels on high-sugar foods

According to the American Heart Association, children aged two to 18 should not consume more than six teaspoons of added sugar per day.

To put things in perspective, a 330ml can of cola contains around seven to nine teaspoons of sugar.

Children already exceed the recommended daily sugar intake on a regular basis, but during festive seasons, this consumption goes to another level since

sugar-loaded treats seem to have become part and parcel of our celebrations.

While obesity and tooth decay are the more obvious problems related to high sugar intake, there are less apparent side effects such as hyperactivity and diabetes.

The good news is that the Health Promotion Board is aware of the problem, and aims to cut the sugar intake here by a quarter by 2020.

Still, in view of the dangers posed

by high sugar intake, it might be time to act now and for warning labels to be carried on high-sugar foods.

Products already carry their nutritional information, but people often ignore it.

Perhaps a visual warning on a product may be able to deter parents from purchasing it for their child, or at least cause them to limit their child's consumption of it.

**Snigdha Sharma (Dr)**

## Time right to focus on moral education

It is encouraging to see Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong emphasise the importance of character and values for our students (To succeed, S'pore needs citizens with values: PM; Jan 6).

After five decades of a "paper chase" mentality, it is time to focus on character and moral education in the next phase of Singapore's development.

The experience of Mr Edwin Chaw ('I flunked the IP': Integrated Programme dropout shares his story; Dec 30, 2018), who saw first-hand how top students sometimes even resort to sabotage to get ahead, shows that education should not focus only on securing good examination results, but also on character building and becoming a socially responsible person.

Civic education at all levels is therefore imperative to inculcate the right values in our students.

Students should be taught to

embrace failure and see it as part and parcel of not only school, but also adult life.

Being a socially responsible person should be treated as not only important for success in school, but also in society.

Our education system can truly be seen as a success if it produces not only students with the necessary skills to earn a living, but also ones imbued with the right values.

**Seah Yam Meng**

### Why Scoot couldn't put up passengers in hotels during delay

We refer to Ms Stacy Wong's feedback on Scoot's handling of the delay on TR899 (Scoot needs to take serious look at crisis management method; Jan 5).

We acknowledge that there have been a series of extended flight delays the past two months and sincerely apologise for the disruption caused to our customers' travel plans.

Aircraft technical issues occur from time to time, and with safety being our highest priority, the resolution of all technical issues to a satisfactory conclusion is a must before the aircraft is allowed back into operations.

While plans are being made to

recover our flights, parallel efforts are taken to mitigate the impact on our customers, such as providing refreshments or meal vouchers and accommodation.

However, in Ms Wong's case, hotel availability in Taipei was limited as it was the year-end peak travel period and we were not able to arrange for accommodation for passengers.

We recognise that there have been shortcomings in our handling of the recent extended delays, and will review all aspects of our operations for improvement.

**Lee Lik Hsin**  
Scoot Chief Executive Officer

#### FORUM ONLINE

- 1. RAMAMURTHY MAHESH KUMAR:** Debate on mynah issue healthy for society.
- 2. TAN TECK HUAT:** Educate readers on commonly mispronounced words.

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# Protect consumers against electricity retailers that pull out

It is disappointing that electricity retailer Red Dot Power has thrown in the towel even before the game had begun (Red Dot Power exits electricity market in S'pore; Jan 5). I question how the Energy Market Authority (EMA) issues licences to electricity retailers. Why are there only 13 retailers participating in the open electricity

market (OEM) when there are 22 electricity retailers in Singapore? Is there a penalty for retailers who decide not to participate in the OEM? Also, is there any penalty for retailers like Red Dot Power who exit the market after signing up customers? Since the company cited financial challenges for its

departure, I would like to know how EMA evaluates the financial status and viability of a retailer before issuing it a license. The standard process when a retailer ceases operations is for customers' accounts to be transferred to the SP Group, where they will be billed according to the regulated tariff.

The customer may therefore not receive the electricity rates promised by the now-defunct retailer. I suggest that EMA appoint an agent to honour the electricity rates until the end of the contract signed, should a retailer cease operations.

**Tan Teck Lee**

## Bouquets

### Top-class service at TTSH

I had recently had cataract operations on two separate occasions at Broadway Plaza, NHG 1-Plaza, the extended facilities of Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) in Ang Mo Kio. My experience, from the initial eye-screening and consultation at TTSH till the two operations at NHG 1-Plaza, can only be described as top-class service.

The staff of both facilities were thoroughly professional, ensuring that I was well cared for from the time I made my appointments till my discharge after surgery. The eye surgeon and her team of hospital staff upheld the ideals of TTSH in being a "people's hospital". Singapore can be proud of the progress it has made in its healthcare journey.

**K Ramakrishnan**

# SMEs have to put their own interests first

It is ideal when small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) collaborate (Singapore wins when SMEs cooperate; Jan 4), but in practice this is hard to do in Singapore's competitive business environment. Tenders put up by our government agencies and stat boards attract numerous bidders fighting to keep their companies alive. Given this cut-throat competition, how do we expect SMEs to share information when only the fittest survive? Even when SMEs do make information available, they have to be careful as sharing too much can break competition law and run the risk of a fine, if the information can be used by competitors to fix prices. We must acknowledge that like

every other disruptive business process, collaboration comes with its share of caveats. For a collaborative effort between companies to be successful, both parties need to have something to offer the other. Cultural differences may also cause a clash in business philosophies. Trust remains a major concern as the parties involved must be willing to abide by the terms of engagement. Some companies have yet to even build levels of trust within their own organisations, let alone with competitors. Until well-established protocols are put in place for collaboration, SMEs will likely remain sceptical as they act out of profit-driven self-interest.

**Cheng Choon Fei**

# Aiming for faster clearance, while ensuring security

The Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) thanks Mr Tan Soon Hock and Mr Gan Chin Kian for their letters, (Hire retired, retrenched people to boost ICA manpower and Why hasn't recurring problem of congestion at land checkpoints been solved?; both published on Dec 29, 2018). Our land checkpoints are among the busiest in the world with daily usage averaging about 400,000 travellers. The number goes up to about 430,000 during the year-end festive season. Unlike air and sea checkpoints where travel volume is subject to landing and berthing space, traffic volume at land checkpoints is dynamic and subject to surges which cannot be completely predicted. ICA officers at the land checkpoints have to handle a variety of scenarios and may be

redeployed at any time to areas which require more support. For example, officers could be reassigned from departure to arrival counters or vice versa, or be ready to clear cars instead of lorries, to adjust to real-time demand. Border checks are our first line of defence against external security threats. ICA officers have to ensure that they do not compromise security while managing congestion. We place great importance on ensuring that our officers have the competencies to perform these jobs well. In this regard, retired Home Team officers with relevant experience form a suitable pool of resources, and ICA has already been employing them to augment our manpower during peak periods. ICA has also expanded the use of

technology to automate clearance. For example, since December 2016, ICA has installed 164 automated clearance lanes at the Woodlands and Tuas checkpoints, which has helped increase the clearance speed of motorcyclists by 30 per cent. Tuas Checkpoint also implemented bus scanners in July last year to enable ICA officers to check buses more effectively and efficiently. These initiatives have helped to alleviate waiting time and also cut reliance on manpower. ICA will continue to find ways to improve clearance efficiency at the land checkpoints without compromising security.

**Brenda Tham (Ms)**

Deputy Head, Public & Internal Communications  
Corporate Communications Division  
Immigration & Checkpoints Authority

# Post Home Team NSmen to the ICA

Rather than post full-time national servicemen to land checkpoints to ease the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority's (ICA) manpower crunch as Mr Lionel de Souza suggests, I propose that we leave them where they are as their youth and fitness may be more suited to their current vocations (Post NSFs to work as ICA checkpoint officers; Jan 5). Instead, move older and more mature operationally ready national servicemen (NSmen) from other Home Team agencies, such as the Singapore Police Force (SPF), to the ICA to be retrained as immigration officers after they have completed the high-key phase of their national service training cycle. Additionally, the ICA can supplement its ranks by recruiting volunteer officers, which the SPF is already doing. If ICA NSmen or part-time volunteers are deemed unsuitable for more sensitive tasks, they can be deployed to less sensitive duties, thereby freeing up career ICA officers to do the front-line work. I also believe that many Singaporeans would find the ICA's critical mission of being Singapore's first line of defence in border security attractive, but it must step up its recruiting efforts. Perhaps it is time to produce a TV series on our ICA officers?

**Edwin Pang**

# Govt intervention needed for bike-sharing to succeed

I am sure that reporter Yuen Sin's disillusionment with bike-sharing services such as oBike and ofo resonated with many Singaporeans (My love-hate relationship with innovations and sharing economy; Jan 6). While the high take-up rates early on suggested popular demand for such services, poor maintenance and regulatory constraints have caused them to become less

popular over time. It is clear that the private sector alone is unable to implement the regulatory measures or infrastructure required to properly maintain bike-sharing services. For bike-sharing to succeed in Singapore, the state must step in to provide regulatory and infrastructural support. All present bike-sharing systems in Singapore are dockless.

Successful bike-sharing schemes tend to operate on a docking system, where bicycles are stored at designated stations. Keeping bicycles in designated areas not only reduces obstruction to traffic, but also prevents theft and vandalism as closed-circuit televisions can be installed to identify perpetrators of such offences. State intervention is required for

this as urban planning approval is required to install docking stations. The Government also has the ability to construct large-scale island-wide infrastructure projects more effectively than the private sector, using information about urban traffic flows and transport networks to decide the best locations for docking stations. The Government's Smart Nation initiative could also play a significant role in reducing bicycle damage. Users could be required to provide some form of identification

in order to use a bicycle, allowing operators to monitor those using their bicycles. This would allow for incidents of bicycle theft or damage to be traced back to those responsible, deterring wilful vandalism. The most successful bike-sharing systems, such as those in Paris and London, operate with at least a degree of government intervention. The Singapore Government must similarly provide infrastructural and regulatory support if bike-sharing is to succeed here.

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**Felix Cheong** has published 13 books across different genres, from poetry to short stories. A recipient of the Young Artist award, he has worked in the media industry for more than 20 years. He holds a master's degree in creative writing and currently teaches journalism at the University of Newcastle and Murdoch University.

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